

Drivers And Barriers Impacting Propensity Toward Violent Extremism

AJLOUN: TARGET LOCATION ANALYSIS



Kufranjah City, Ajloun governorate.

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This report provides Target Location-specific findings as part of a larger study entitled, "Factors Influencing Propensity Toward Violent Extremism and Influence Pathways Toward Extremism in Jordan."

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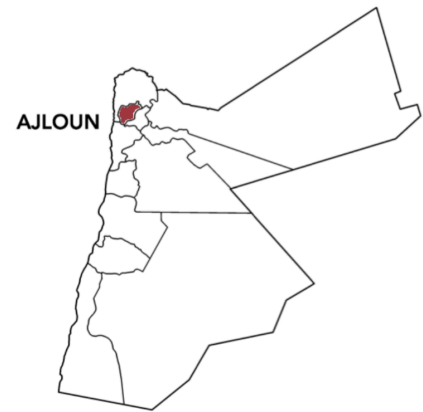
List of Acronyms

AJYC:	All Jordan Youth Committee
AQ:	Al Qa'ida
CMCD:	Change Medium Center for Development
CVE:	Counter Violent Extremism
DI:	Depth Interview
DK:	'Don't Know' (GQ Answers)
FSA:	Free Syrian Army
GID:	General Intelligence Directorate (Jordan)
GQ:	Guided Questionnaire
IAF:	Islamic Action Front
ISIS:	Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham
JAF:	Jordanian Armed Forces
JD:	Jordanian Dinar
JI:	Jaysh Al Islam
JN:	Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) ¹
KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MB:	Muslim Brotherhood
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
RF:	'Refuse to Answer' (GQ Answers)
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
VE:	Violent Extremism
VEO:	Violent Extremist Organization

¹ In July 2016, Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra) rebranded as Jabhat Fatah Al Sham (Conquest of Syria Front). For the purposes of this report, the group is referred to as the former since primary research—including specific questions about Al Nusra—commenced prior to the group's rebranding.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In several ways, Ajloun is relatively isolated. Its geographical location on the western border highlands makes it one of the country's most physically remote governorates. At the same time, it accommodates a relatively insulated society, which is to a significant extent excluded from the country's economic benefits. For instance, it exhibits an exceptionally high poverty rate of approximately 26 percent – compared with a national median of around 14 percent – and had one of the country's highest unemployment rates of approximately 19 percent in the second quarter of 2016. Indeed, although Ajloun has produced relatively few violent extremist organization (VEO) recruits – compared, for example, with neighboring Irbid – poverty and unemployment emerged as two of the chief underlying driving forces of VEO recruitment in the governorate. This is most evident in suburban towns and villages including three of the governorate's violent extremism (VE) hotspots: Kufranjah district, Ibbin (Sakhrayh district) and Anjara (Ajloun district). Each of these is among Ajloun's poverty pockets. Indeed, Kufranjah and Ibbin, along with Orjan district, are also among the areas disproportionately afflicted by substandard water and electricity services. Meanwhile, Kufranjah, along with Anjara (especially the Al Ishara area), exhibits the governorate's highest crime rates as is manifest in drug abuse and the prevalence of firearms. The latter have been used on several occasions with fatal outcomes, most notably in Anjara where Ajloun's tribal conflicts are most commonplace.



It is also in Anjara and Kufranjah where Ajloun's VEO activists are concentrated, including representatives of the Salafist Jihadist community. However, this movement does not appear to have a large presence in Ajloun, and it is largely unpopular. In addition to Salafist Jihadists, Anjara has exhibited evidence of Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham (ISIS) support, notably in the Al Ishara area. This is where a pro-ISIS radical has actively campaigned for the organization on a regular basis, leading to frequent imprisonment. Indeed, ISIS supporters emerged as the most vocal VEO advocates in the governorate, though local opposition toward the group is strongest of all the VEOs in question by a significant margin. Meanwhile, there have been numerous attempts by locals to join ISIS, some with success and some without. These individuals have been residents of Anjara and Kufranjah. Unlike ISIS, Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) (JN) has achieved a noble reputation among much of Ajloun's population, many of whom regard it essentially as a liberation movement working in the interests of the Syrian population. However, Guided Questionnaire (GQ) results revealed that the organization has failed to convince the majority. Similarly, Al Qa'ida (AQ) receives much praise for its regional 'liberation' efforts. For example, several respondents referred to the organization as a resistance movement against US imperial conquests in the region – assumptions they have based on its previous activity in Afghanistan. However, for those who focused on the group's isolated terror attacks, AQ represents a violent and unjustified terrorist outfit. Hamas, meanwhile, was met with universal approval among Depth Interview (DI) respondents, who portrayed it as a legitimate resistance organization fighting for the liberation of 'Islamic land' in Gaza and the West Bank. These views, however, were somewhat contradicted by quantitative findings.

As for non-violent Islamist groups, both Salafist Quietists and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) have a strong presence in Ajloun. The MB is concentrated in Anjara, Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district), Ayn Janna (Ajloun district) and Ajloun City, as well as Ibbin and Kufranjah districts, where it operates religious schools, providing classes for families and orphans. Although many DI respondents spoke positively about the organization, deeming it a barrier to VEO recruitment, quantitative results revealed much objection to its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Indeed, some respondents cited the MB's political activism as a route to VE, as it supposedly stimulates anti-state grievances. Salafist Quietists also emerged simultaneously as a potential gateway and barrier to VE and VEOs. Concentrated in Anjara, Ibbin, Kufranjah, Sakhrat town, Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district) and Ajloun City, the movement is highly active in Ajloun, with members campaigning for the core principles – namely the five pillars of Islam – in neighborhoods, mosques and residents' homes. With that in mind, it is the only Islamist group believed to have received overwhelming support across the governorate.

The threat of VE in Ajloun is relatively low. However, respondents claimed that it has been on the rise since Syrian refugees began arriving in the governorate in 2012. In fact, according to the majority of respondents, Syrian refugees constitute the greatest VE threat of all Ajloun's cohorts. This perception is fueled by numerous rumors as well as past incidents. For example, several Syrian refugees have been deported back to Syria since arriving in Ajloun due to alleged criminal behavior, including recruiting for VEOs and committing rape. Additionally, in 2014 a Syrian ISIS cell was discovered in Jordan that included residents of Orjan district, Kufranjah district and Anjara. Meanwhile, Ibbin contains the lion's share of Ajloun's Syrian refugees, and among those residing here are reportedly many JN and ISIS supporters. Aside from these proximate links to VE, the arrival of Syrian refugees has indirectly contributed to the economic drivers of VEO recruitment. For instance, Syrian refugees are undercutting wages in the private sector, thus driving down residents' incomes or displacing them entirely from employment. Also exacerbating economic strains, the influx of refugees has evidently driven up housing rents. The consequent deterioration in local living standards has strengthened the appeal of VEO recruitment packages, a major component of which is financial benefits. Indeed, most respondents were highly aware of the economic rewards associated with VEOs; ISIS in particular has gained a reputation for its substantial payouts. Furthermore, findings suggested that VEOs have employed 'middle men' working at the local level to identify potential recruits, assessing their needs and channeling incentives accordingly.

Aside from operatives on the ground, VEOs have reached out to prospective recruits in Ajloun through social media, most notably Facebook. This is one platform from which they effectively promote their ideologies in an attempt to radicalize youth and/or recruit them. In achieving the latter end, the most effective of these narratives is probably that of beleaguered Muslim civilians suffering at the hands of the Syrian regime, which is very unpopular in Ajloun. To accompany this narrative, VEOs and Salafist Jihadists are attempting to inculcate in local youth the notion of an Islamic duty to perform jihad. Testament to the success of this message, a considerable minority of GQ respondents agreed that a Syrian jihad is justifiable. Meanwhile, media outlets that frequently broadcast news items detailing the suffering of Muslims across the globe appear to be amplifying the resonance of a dutiful jihad among locals. Two other elements of VEO ideologies that resonate strongly with the public are the prospect of an Islamic caliphate and the vilification of Shia Islam. Indeed, a significant proportion of respondents deemed jihad against Shia Muslims to be justified and expressed concerns about a Shia resurgence within Jordan.

Finally, despite numerous local religious figures being convicted and banned from preaching, respondents indicated that radical imams are continuing to lend credibility to VEOs during Friday prayers and advancing the notion of a legitimate jihad in Syria. This is occurring predominantly in suburban towns and village mosques. Similar messages are reportedly being promoted by traveling bands of Salafist Jihadists, who deliver sermons and religious lessons during their stay. These groups are apparently active in Sakhras district. Meanwhile, there is a distinct inadequacy of counter violent extremist (CVE) narratives being advanced by local preachers. Indeed, government-employed imams tasked with this job are failing to resonate with local youth due to a lack of training and a focus on outdated topics.

2.0 ISLAMIST AND VEO SUPPORT

2.1 SUPPORT FOR VEOs

With the exception of Hamas, most respondents considered VEOs equally illegitimate, although there is considerable sympathy for AQ and JN.

Hamas is by far the most popular of the VEOs in question. However, ISIS has the most pronounced presence in Ajloun, where its supporters are more vocal than those of other VEOs. In addition, ISIS' prevalence in the media translates into a common belief across Ajloun that the organization constitutes the greatest local threat among regional VEOs. Meanwhile, however, of the VEOs in question, ISIS is evidently the most unpopular in Ajloun. Unlike ISIS, JN and AQ received much praise from DI respondents, many of whom recognized these organizations as resistance movements – whether in Syria against the Assad regime or in Afghanistan against US forces. However, quantitative findings revealed that the majority of respondents objected to these groups, and some individuals equated them with ISIS on the basis of their violent methodologies and divisive ideologies. Indeed, several respondents made sweeping judgments about oppositional groups active in Syria and Iraq, even referring to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in the same negative vein as ISIS and JN.¹ In fact, considering a profound aversion to the Syrian regime across Ajloun, the FSA receives remarkably little support and much opposition. As quantitative findings revealed, 59 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition, while only 22 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for the FSA in their community. It is notable, however, that a considerable 16 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that their community is neutral toward the organization (see Figure 2).

There are several pockets of support for ISIS in Ajloun.

There is little evidence that many of Ajloun's permanent residents have successfully left the border to join ISIS since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. This is despite a number of indications that the organization does have a degree of support across the governorate. According to respondents, any sympathy for ISIS is concentrated predominantly among Ajloun's Syrian refugees, notably in Ibbin (Sakhrah district) and Sakhrah town (Sakhrah district). In addition, respondents recalled the discovery of an ISIS cell within Awsara Village (Ajloun district) in December 2015, although the origin of the culprits was unspecified. Several respondents implied that local support for ISIS is higher than any evidence might suggest, as many residents – Jordanian as well as Syrian – are harboring a secret approval of the group.² If true, this circumspection is most likely in response to an implicit taboo surrounding the organization, as well as fears of punitive security reprisals.³ Some individuals, however, have been more vocal in their support for ISIS. For example, a man from the Al Ishara area of Anjara is infamous for his frequent public exclamations of solidarity with the organization; a typical phrase that he would shout is: "Remaining and Expanding," a famous ISIS slogan that the organization used as the cover title for the

¹ "ISIS, Nusra, the Free Syrian Army, and other groups are all terroristic and destructive. They are all the same." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

² "There are a number of active people who secretly sympathize with them [ISIS]." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

³ "Their [VEOs] effect is minimal since they [VEO supporters] can't express their opinions directly. Even if someone talked about ISIS, they prefer not to talk." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

fifth edition of its online magazine, *Dabiq*.⁴ The same individual has on occasion also distributed pro-ISIS flyers. Aged between 45 and 48 years, the man in question was formerly a street vendor before becoming devoutly religious in 2014, growing his beard and sporting ISIS-style attire. He has been detained on several occasions, most recently in 2014, and remains incarcerated at the time of writing. However, his slogan of choice has permeated society to some extent, apparently aided by TV news channels.⁵ Meanwhile, in Sakhrāh district, there are reportedly groups of vocal ISIS supporters, who refuse to recognize the organization as a terrorist outfit and prefer instead to refer to it as a jihadist organization. Indeed, although far from the most popular VEO in Ajloun, ISIS has the strongest impact and its supporters are the most active. This has led some to the conclusion that ISIS also has the most supporters among hardline Islamists in their locality. Ajloun district has also exhibited indications of ISIS support. For example, when a local man from Sakhrāh was killed while fighting with ISIS in Syria, a large congregation reportedly gathered at a mosque in Ayn Janna to pray for the deceased. In addition, they are reported to have prayed for those continuing to fight with ISIS in Syria.⁶

"Daesh [ISIS] has the most supporters [in Sakhrāh district]. Most of the religious extremists support Daesh, and they refuse to call it a terrorist group; they consider them a jihadist group."

(Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

Despite a well-cultivated reputation, ISIS remains unpopular in Ajloun, mostly for its brutal style of killing.

Although only few have been successful, several locals have actually attempted to reach ISIS in Iraq or Syria. One of these individuals, who was from Anjara (Ajloun district), tried to reach the organization via Turkey in 2015, but was arrested *en route*. Likewise, another man was arrested when preparing to leave for Syria in 2015. Based on discussions with respondents, numerous explanations emerged for ISIS support in Ajloun. First, the organization has gained a reputation for being the largest and the wealthiest VEO in the region, if not the world.⁷ Second, along with JN, some locals identified ISIS as a movement focused on combatting the Syrian regime, which was largely unpopular in Ajloun (see 6.2 Perceived Impact of Foreign and Domestic Interventionism). Third, ISIS has a reputation as the most formidable of the VEOs active in Syria, even more so than JN.⁸ Fourth, ISIS has successfully convinced some residents that it is representative of true Islam. This is based on its pursuit of an Islamic caliphate, its endorsement

⁴ Dabiq 2014. 'Remaining and Expanding', Dabiq, Issue 05, November 21, 2014.

⁵ "The news we hear on TV is that ISIS is remaining and expanding." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

⁶ "Of course the guy was killed in Al Sham [Greater Syria]. The sheikh who prayed on his body in the mosque here prayed the Absentee Prayer, and prayed for his brothers, and he meant Daesh with that. When the sheikh prays for 'our jihadi brothers in Al Sham', he means Daesh." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

⁷ "The most active groups are the groups who have money. Right now ISIS is the biggest organization that is harming the world through extremism." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁸ "As for Ajloun, they [the people] know that ISIS is the most dominant. ISIS is a bigger force [than JN] with soldiers from all around the world that have no cause but to kill." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

of jihad and its application of Sharia law.⁹ Finally, for some residents, ISIS is a product of economic and moral grievances in the region, lending it a degree of legitimacy.¹⁰

That said, the majority of Ajloun's residents have a negative opinion of ISIS. This is true even of those who attribute legitimacy to groups including AQ and JN.¹¹ As revealed in quantitative findings, an overwhelming 89 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition, while only four percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for ISIS in their community (see Figure 2). Such high levels of objection to the organization are mainly based on its violent, apparently indiscriminate and unjustified methodologies.¹² This includes its use of media to broadcast violent punishments to a global audience.¹³ In particular, it is ISIS' brutality toward women and children, as well as its encouragement of sexual jihad that local critics object to. For several respondents, these practices are un-Islamic, and by falsely claiming to be acting on religious foundations, ISIS constitutes for them a burden on Islam. Indeed, one respondent even suggested that ISIS was intent on eroding religion altogether.¹⁴ As well as through media output, these negative perceptions of the group have been fueled by first-hand accounts of individuals who have encountered ISIS, who have typically depicted the organization as repressive, excessively violent and criminal.¹⁵ Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that local antipathy toward the organization has intensified since January 2015, following its murder of the Jordanian pilot Moath Al Kasasbeh.¹⁶ Aside from its violent activities, some objection toward ISIS derives from its military negligence with relation to Iran and Israel.¹⁷ Thus, were the organization more active against these states, its local support base would likely be higher.

"Daesh kills children and women, rapes girls and allows Jihad Al Nikah [sexual jihad], all of which are far cries from the tolerant religion of Islam."

(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

⁹ "Some people believe that ISIS is applying Islam when it established the Islamic state, called for jihad and executed prescribed penalties." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁰ "Some extremists in Ajloun have another opinions: they see that ISIS is a result of inequality and injustice that these countries suffered from." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹¹ "Other groups are fighting for their rights generally while ISIS is a terrorist organization that doesn't represent Islam at all. This is the way everybody sees ISIS [...] ISIS is the only terrorist group among them." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹² "ISIS kills everyone, without any reason." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹³ "All people hate ISIS. The videos they post [of their members] executing and killing and stoning – this is wrong; this is not religion." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

¹⁴ "ISIS was created to decrease religious activity and push the world toward secularism." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁵ "He said that they [ISIS] are people who don't know Allah or Mohammad; [that] all they do is kill people randomly and that they haven't left anything undone. He said that everyone has to commit to their [ISIS'] orders and sometimes they would kill people for the most trivial reasons. [He also said that] they do [horrendous] things to people and take their money, and that they rob a lot of shops too." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

¹⁶ "The way Moath Al Kasasbeh was dealt with by ISIS caused many people to stop sympathizing with them." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁷ "ISIS didn't do any operation in Israel or Iran. Where are they then?" (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

The majority disapproves of JN, but with a widespread perception that its sole purpose is resistance against the Syrian regime, it is far more popular than ISIS.

Unlike ISIS, which is comprised of recruits from across the globe, JN resembles a fundamentally Syrian movement according to locals. Furthermore, they consider the organization's agenda more focused on combatting the Syrian regime compared with ISIS' seemingly less discriminate targets.¹⁸ This perception accounts for much of the group's local support.¹⁹ Indeed, several respondents referred to JN as a liberation movement fighting for its own entitlements,²⁰ as well as those of the wider Syrian population. In fact, one respondent implied that JN is acting mainly on behalf of the Syrian population as opposed to pursuing its own agenda.²¹ This suggests a resemblance between JN and the initial Syrian revolutionary current of 2011. Indeed, respondents between them expressed a stronger perception that, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, JN is more affiliated with a Syrian liberation movement than it is with AQ. This view has possibly been reinforced since the organization severed its links with AQ and 'rebranded' itself Jabhat Fateh Al Sham in July 2016.²² One respondent, for instance, maintained that while AQ and ISIS have close connections, JN is a distinctly less extreme organization.²³ Consistent with this is a perception among locals that JN is representative of "real Islam."²⁴ These positive views of the organization prevail despite its perceived absence in Jordan.²⁵ Bearing in mind the considerable publicity afforded ISIS across the country, which is overwhelmingly damaging to its reputation (see above), JN's relative silence may play into its favor, though quantitative findings also suggested that it might account for the organization's relative obscurity in the governorate, 10 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that they had not heard of JN (see Figure 2). Although not certain, respondents suggested that the organization's main support base in Ajloun can be found in Kufranjah district.

Despite this favorable image of JN, the organization enjoys little popularity in Ajloun according to quantitative findings. While 12 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support, 72 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to JN in their community (see Figure 2). Indeed, several respondents equated JN with ISIS.²⁶ In some cases this was along the lines of their violent methodologies. For example, one respondent likened both JN and ISIS to the ancient takfirist movement of the *khawarij*.²⁷ Other respondents referred to JN and ISIS as equally complicit in the

¹⁸ "Al Nusra [JN] is mostly anti-regime Syrians – Syrians that are against the Ba'ath party." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁹ "People sympathize with Al Nusra [JN] because they are against the Syrian regime." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²⁰ "[JN] is a group fighting for its lost rights. Nusra is defending its rights." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²¹ "From what we hear, we know that Al Nusra is defending the Syrian people." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²² Maher, Shiraz 2016. 'Horror in Aleppo', The New Statesman, October 27, 2016.

²³ "ISIS is an extension of Al Qa'ida, while Nusra is a less extreme and less violent group." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁴ "Some people support it here, thinking that Nusra represents the real Islam." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁵ "Jabhat Al Nusra are not present in Jordan." (Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

²⁶ "ISIS and Al Nusra are two faces of one currency." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

²⁷ "Usually, both Daesh and Al Nusra are called Kharijites." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

destruction of Syrian and Iraqi land and slaughter of civilians.²⁸ Likewise, several respondents even implied that JN is currently allied with ISIS in a common cause.²⁹ For some individuals, this is a positive partnership, based apparently on a shared core motivation to defend Islam.³⁰

"[JN] is fighting against the Syrian regime in order to defend Syrians. It is getting people's acceptance because it defends the Syrian citizen."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Although rejected by the majority, some support AQ.

Whether or not identifying structural links between the organizations, several respondents referred to AQ in the same vein as ISIS and JN. It is according to these groups' perceived violence and divisive principles that locals connect them, some dismissing them all as un-Islamic.³¹ Another criticism against AQ springs from its application of extreme violence and its perceived association with Wahhabism.³² It was these negative views of the organization that prevailed in quantitative findings, which indicated that 76 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition, while only 13 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for AQ in their community (see Figure 2). That said, according to many respondents, AQ represents an Islamic resistance organization against Western regional occupation. For example, one respondent defended 9/11 as an act of defiance rather than terrorism; contrary to chronological events, the atrocity was supposedly inflicted in retaliation to US military activities against Muslims in Afghanistan.³³ In fact, the identification of AQ as an Islamic resistance movement against a malign US incursion in Afghanistan is apparently not unusual in Ajloun.³⁴ Similarly, another respondent suggested that local support for AQ is based on its perceived contributions to the Palestinian cause and its hand in the battle against US forces in Iraq.³⁵ For these individuals, AQ is not associated with violence toward civilians, but rather a legitimate struggle against predominantly Western superpowers.³⁶ Considering these various opinions, the dividing line between those who regard AQ as a

²⁸ "ISIS and Al Nusra have demolished Syria and Iraq. They didn't let people live in peace and all they do is murder innocent people." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

²⁹ "[JN] is united with ISIS temporarily because they both have the same goal." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

³⁰ "I believe that the ideologies of these groups [AQ, ISIS and JN] are very similar [...] defending Islam and resisting. They all agree on martyrdom operations." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³¹ "Al Qa'ida, Jabhat Al Nusra and Daesh have maimed Islamic religion. Their groups work on racist, ethnic, religious, sectarian and confessional bases." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

³² "Al Qa'ida is known for its Wahhabist extreme ideology. It uses bombs and violence. It is a terrorist organization." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³³ "Al Qa'ida came out to defend Muslims from America. America attacked Afghanistan, and the September 11 bombing was Bin Laden's reaction to the Muslim killings in Afghanistan. He wanted to threaten America and stop its war on Muslim areas." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

³⁴ "Some people think that they support Al Qa'ida because they believe that it defends Islam and Muslims in Afghanistan and resists Americans." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁵ "I believe that my community supports Al Qa'ida in the first place since it is a group that defends the Palestinian and Islamic cases and fought against Americans in Iraq." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁶ "Al Qa'ida used to fight against America; it didn't do anything to [civilians]." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

terrorist organization and those who believe it to be an Islamic resistance movement depended much on their point of focus. For example, those referring to the group's isolated terror attacks tended to view it negatively,³⁷ while those discussing its participation in regional conflicts are more enthusiastic about the organization. Indeed, those principally associating AQ with Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan are more likely to view it in a positive light.³⁸ This may imply that its current leader, Ayman Al Zawahiri, is less popular in Ajloun than was his predecessor. Accordingly, even among its supporters, AQ is seen as a redundant organization.³⁹

"Al Qa'ida is defending its lands, rights, people and sons against Americans and the British. Al Qa'ida is with Islam. Al Qa'ida is trying to free its land from occupation."

(Male, 30 Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Though it faces much opposition, Hamas has a reputation as a legitimate resistance organization that eschews violence against civilians.

Hamas is widely respected in Ajloun on the basis that locals regard it as a legitimate, if not a necessary, organization fighting in defense of Palestinians against an Israeli oppressor. In fact, according to one respondent, any entity opposing Israel is inherently virtuous,⁴⁰ which might account for what little support there is for Hezbollah in Ajloun (see below). Beyond its perceived identity as a Palestinian resistance organization, respondents also implied that Hamas is representative of Islam more broadly.⁴¹ This is inherent in the fact that much support for the group derives from its campaigning to secure absolute Islamic ownership over Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque.⁴² This is in stark contrast with the majority view of ISIS, for example, which most locals view as un-Islamic (see above).⁴³ Similarly, several respondents emphasized their contention that Hamas is not a terrorist organization. Furthermore, in distinguishing Hamas from other VEOs, respondents were keen to argue that Hamas does not harm civilians, but rather focuses its military operations against justified targets.⁴⁴ Accordingly, although recognized as a jihadist organization, locals define Hamas' pursuits as a 'legitimate' jihad, as opposed to that of ISIS for example. Correspondingly, and contrary to most opinions on ISIS recruits, respondents were enthusiastic about any

³⁷ "Al Qa'ida committed terrorist operations – I mean the bombings in America are terrorist attacks." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁸ "Al Qa'ida is not very popular but some people still support it from the days of Afghanistan and Bin Laden." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

³⁹ "Al Qa'ida has no reputation; a long time ago we used to talk about it, but Al Qa'ida is now in the past." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

⁴⁰ "Hamas is against Israel, and anyone against Israel is good." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

⁴¹ "[Hamas] is a Muslim group that is fighting against the Jewish occupation of Palestine." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

⁴² "Hamas is not a terrorist [organization]. How can we say that those who defend their land, country, people and Al Aqsa [Mosque] are bad?" (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁴³ "[ISIS] is working against Islam." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

⁴⁴ "I see that they [Hamas] are defending their country legally; they don't kill innocent people and they only fight the Israeli occupation." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

individuals who join Hamas as fighters.⁴⁵ With that said, contrary the opinions of respondents discussed here, 51 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition, while only 29 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Hamas in their community. Meanwhile, a considerable 15 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is neutrality toward Hamas in their community (see Figure 2).

"Hamas is not a terrorist group. It is an Islamic resistance group, and no one in Jordan considers it terrorist. It resists against the Israeli occupation on its land."

(Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

Hezbollah and Hizb ut-Tahrir are largely unpopular and their presence is limited, although the latter has convened numerous private gatherings.

Although Hizb ut-Tahrir operates secretly in keeping with its outlaw status in Jordan, the organization is known to have a presence in Anjara (Ajloun district). Here, it has held private events, including at least one in the local Irada institution (see section 3.1 Education and Employment). Similarly, a local rumor maintains that, in August 2015, a leading sheikh from the Momani tribe in Ayn Janna (Ajloun district) hosted a dinner party to which he invited several members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in order to discuss the prospect of an Islamic caliphate. Testament to the success of the organization's furtiveness, 13 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that they had not heard of Hizb ut-Tahrir (see Figure 2). However, notwithstanding such secrecy, one respondent claimed that Hizb ut-Tahrir openly advocates for an Islamic caliphate within Ajloun.⁴⁶ Indeed, several members of the party have been apprehended in Ajloun for public campaigning: in October 2014, the security forces arrested Abdel Jaleel Al Zghoul and Abdel Baset Abdel Samad for distributing flyers about Hizb ut-Tahrir and for attempting to recruit members into the organization. Although DI respondents gave Hizb ut-Tahrir very little mention, quantitative findings revealed that the group enjoys little popularity in Ajloun: only 14 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support, while 58 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Hizb ut-Tahrir in their community. Significantly, 14 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that their community was neutral toward Hizb ut-Tahrir (see Figure 2).

Although much more widely recognized, Hezbollah received levels of support in Ajloun that are comparable to Hizb ut-Tahrir. That said, probably in light of its collaboration with the Syrian regime, Hezbollah is met with greater hostility in the governorate than is Hizb ut-Tahrir. As revealed in quantitative findings, 67 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition, while 14 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Hezbollah in their community. In addition, 15 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is neutrality toward Hezbollah in their community (see Figure 2).

⁴⁵ "It's wrong if he joined ISIS. But he is my Muslim brother if he is going to join Hamas since he is going to fight against a Jewish group." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

⁴⁶ "In Ajloun there are traces of the Islamist Freedom Party [Hizb ut-Tahrir] who call for the rise of the state of Khilafa. They are present in Anjara." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

Despite their Islamist rhetoric, Salafist Jihadists have failed to convince most locals that they are representative of Islam.

Since it's reinvigoration following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Jordan's Salafist Jihadist current has been publicly active in promoting its ideological values as an alternative to that of the incumbent regime. For example, several figureheads from both the 'Maqdisi wing' and the 'Zarqawi wing' of the movement have openly criticized the government's participation in the US-led coalition against ISIS as being unjustified. This includes Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi, Abu Qatada Al Filastini and Abu Sayyaf,⁴⁷ as well as Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi.⁴⁸ The latter has also publicly made calls for the implementation of Sharia rule.⁴⁹ However, such messages have failed to convince the majority in Ajloun that Salafist Jihadists are truly representative of Islam. In fact, one respondent even refused to recognize one of the movement's current leaders, Abu Sayyaf, as a religious figure.⁵⁰ With that in mind, respondents overwhelmingly regarded Salafist Jihadists as a gateway to other VEOs. This is consistent with campaigning by members of the group in support of JN and ISIS. Abu Sayyaf, for example, has been an advocate and active recruiter of Jordanian youths for JN since the early stages of the Syrian conflict.⁵¹ Additionally, Salafist Jihadist local representatives are known to be actively campaigning for their own organization, attempting to recruit from a pool of Salafist Quietists if not elsewhere. This is reportedly occurring in Salah Al Din Mosque on Qal'aa street in Ajloun City. However, the local Salafist Jihadist movement is otherwise concentrated in Anjara (Ajloun district) and Kufranjah district. Although it does appear to have a following in these areas, this is unlikely to be substantial. For example, only nine percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support, while 72 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Salafist Jihadists in their community. It is also noteworthy that nine percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that they had not heard of Salafist Jihadists, while nine percent reported that there was neutrality toward Salafist Jihadists in their community (see Figure 2).

⁴⁷ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, May 18, 2015.

⁴⁸ Ammon News 2014. 'Tahawi from Prison: "Daesh is not a bubble...and satanic alliance"', Ammon News, October 01, 2014.

⁴⁹ Lister, Tim 2012. 'Analysis: Jordan's King Abdullah faces crisis', CNN, November 17, 2012.

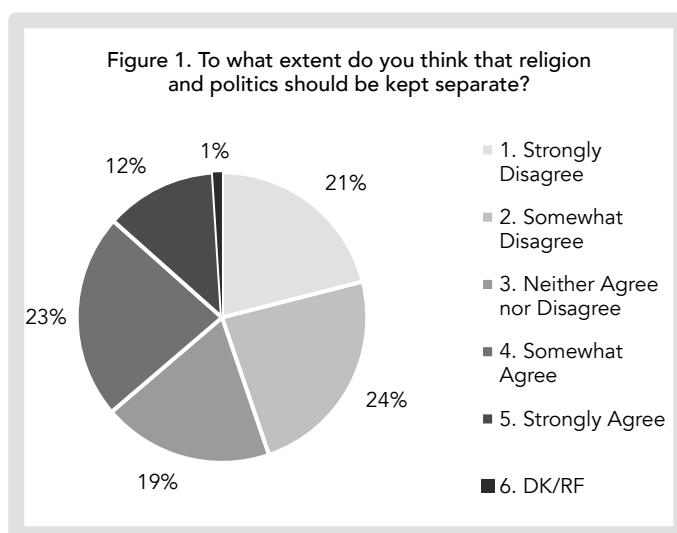
⁵⁰ "Abu Sayyaf used to stimulate his supporters, yet we do not see him as religious because he doesn't represent Islam." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

⁵¹ BBC News 2013. 'Covert help for Syria's rebels in Jordan', BBC News, April 26, 2013.

2.2 SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL AND NON-VIOLENT ISLAMIST GROUPS

The MB has a strong presence in Ajloun, and the majority appreciates its potential as a barrier to VEOs.

One respondent made clear distinctions between the Jordanian chapter of the MB and its equivalent in Egypt. While the latter receives criticism for stoking violence and fostering religious intolerance,⁵² the local MB is understood to be less extreme. Some respondents also distinguished the MB from Salafism, including Salafist Quietists, claiming that the MB is more socially and religiously responsible than the latter and nurtures a more moderate ideology. Accordingly, many respondents disassociated the organization from terrorism,⁵³ and referred to it as a religious political entity with the capacity to safeguard people from VEOs.⁵⁴ Concentrated within Anjara (Ajloun district), Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district), Ayn Janna (Ajloun district) – where most of Ajloun’s MB leaders reside – but also in Kufranjah district (especially the Nimer neighborhood), Ibbin (Sakhras district) and some parts of Abenfi, the MB has a strong presence in Ajloun, and has achieved its positive reputation through a number of means. This includes apparent active discouragement of violent public demonstrations⁵⁵ and the provision of religious programs for young people.⁵⁶ For example, in the districts of Ibbin and Kufranjah, the MB operates religious schools, such as Ibbin Modern Islamic School, where the organization provides education – including Qur’anic memorization classes – for families and orphans. Also contributing to the MB’s favorable reputation is its general community engagement and service provision. For example, in Ibbin and Ajloun City, the MB provides services through the local Islamic Center Societies. This includes the distribution of food and clothes to disadvantaged families during Ramadan. Other respondents



⁵² “In Egypt the religious speech was to gather around the Muslim Brotherhood and provoke against Christians – that’s why there were bombings at churches.” (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁵³ “People of Ajloun support the Muslim brotherhood group since it is a political group and has nothing to do with terrorism.” (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

⁵⁴ “The Muslim Brotherhood is no more than an ideological and political movement; I don’t think it’s a gateway but a barrier to more extremism because they do not support Daesh [ISIS] or the takfirists.” (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

⁵⁵ “When it was announced that a demonstration in Ajloun was going to happen, one day or two days before the demonstration, religious leaders, even Muslim Brotherhood leaders, would talk to people and convince them to not demonstrate, and that there is no need for violence.” (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁵⁶ “The Muslim Brotherhood is a moderate group; they are not extremists. On the contrary, they have religious programs to keep young people away from extremism.” (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

championed the group's pursuit of political Islam, which has increasing appeal as living standards deteriorate (see section 3.0 Basic Needs Drivers and Barriers) and the incumbent regime is increasingly viewed as corrupted (see section 4.0 Governance Drivers and Barriers).⁵⁷ Indeed, contrary to other Target Locations across the country, much of Ajloun's population is supportive of the idea that religion and politics should be fused as represented by the MB. For example, 45 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 35 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that religion and politics should be kept separate. It is noteworthy however, that 19 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 2).

The MB's perceived capacity to act as a barrier to VEOs is partly based on its public rejection of more extreme Islamist groups such as ISIS, and their ideological principles. For example, the MB has publicly stated its approval of the locally popular Amman Message (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives),⁵⁸ and has denounced ISIS' immolation of Moath Al Kasasbeh as an un-Islamic act.⁵⁹ Indeed, the group's more general public denunciation of ISIS has also facilitated a moderate image of the group among locals.⁶⁰ The fact that the MB has the largest presence in the areas that are also Ajloun's VEO hotspots – namely Anjara (Ajloun district) and Kufranjah – amplifies its potential function as a barrier to VE. Respondents who recognized this lamented the government's obstructions against the MB, such as denying the group a political license and shutting down its offices across the country in April 2016.⁶¹ This includes the MB's Ajloun office, located in Ajloun City, which has not been reopened at the time of writing.

"The Muslim Brotherhood are good. They act as a gate for security and safety and act as a barrier against violence. But the government ignores them. They should allow people to vote. I'm not sure about my information, but from what I know, the Muslim Brotherhood is more mature than the Salafist Quietists. The Muslim Brotherhood's ideology is open minded. They are mature and they are not against the government. I am saying that the Muslim Brotherhood is a barrier against violence."

(Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

⁵⁷ "The MB is not an extremist group. It has its own ideology. Their goal is to reach the power and authority in order to make Jordan an Islamic country. The reason for their popularity is people sticking to the religion of Islam and believing that Islam is the solution. When we have corrupted governments, a bad economic situation, poverty and unemployment, then people would start thinking of Islam as the solution by establishing a Jordanian Islamic country." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

⁵⁸ Terrill, Andrew. 2010. Global Security Watch: Jordan. California, Colorado & Oxford: Praeger: (134). 2010.

⁵⁹ Middle East Monitor 2015. 'Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood condemns pilot execution', Middle East Monitor, February 04, 2015.

⁶⁰ "The Muslim Brotherhood also stated that ISIS and other Islamic movements that go under the name of Islam are not real Muslims, and Islam is innocent of them." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁶¹ Akkad, Dania 2016. 'Jordanian security services close Brotherhood's headquarters', Middle East Eye, April 14, 2016.

To some, the MB encourages VE through its political activism, which has made the IAF unpopular in Ajloun.

Contrary to the image of the MB detailed above, some respondents objected to the organization, considering it a route toward VE. For example, several respondents explained that the MB has, on occasion, engaged in and encouraged violent activism against the government. Moreover, one respondent echoed a number of news reports claiming that members of the MB had threatened to join ISIS after the government shut down the organization's offices across the country in April 2016.⁶² Another respondent cited the MB's public activism in Kufranjah as a driving factor of VE. Here, the organization is apparently successful in mobilizing local youth to participate in demonstrations, addressing issues of unemployment and poverty.⁶³ Similarly, the late Abd Al Mun'im Abu Zant, who, in 2011 during nationwide unrest issued a fatwa in favor of street demonstrations, received accusations of having inflamed anti-state activism.⁶⁴ Indeed, he was a vocal opponent of the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty and supporter of Hamas, and frequently criticized the US. The former IAF leader Hamzeh Mansour is another figure from within the movement who draws criticism for supposedly encouraging violence against the state.⁶⁵ This is not least based on his contributions to the March 2011 Dakhleyeh Circle (Amman) protests, as well as his writing and public appearances. For example, in a January 2013 Al Jazeera interview, Mansour made a direct appeal for political reform and was explicit in his encouragement of popular protest.⁶⁶ Indeed, it appears to be predominantly based on such political confrontation and incitement that the MB, and especially its official political arm, the IAF, faces considerable disapproval in Ajloun. For example, 68 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition, while only 19 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for the IAF in their community (see Figure 2). As an Islamist group, the MB's apparent ideological symmetry with VEOs is also a point of concern for locals, with one respondent claiming that this facilitates the transition of members between the groups.⁶⁷ Perceptions of the MB's VE ideology stem partly from personal encounters with members of the organization, who, on occasion, have rebuked local young men for wearing Western clothing and being clean shaven. Respondents identifying links between the MB and VE were noticeably anxious about the influence of the MB and the IAF in Ajloun. These fears were related to their perceived capacity to influence large numbers of youth and indoctrinate them with extreme ideas, apparently aided by expendable financial resources. Similarly, one

⁶² "A while ago, [the MB] had a disagreement with the government; the group threatened the government that it would start dealing with ISIS." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

⁶³ "In the Kufranjah area, the reason [for a VE risk] is the presence of an Islamic group [the MB] that has an effect on youth. This group was organizing protests against the government demanding it to decrease poverty and unemployment rates." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

⁶⁴ "Abu Zant used to provoke [people in] prayers on Friday to demonstrate after praying. The demonstrations called, indirectly, for people to oppose the government and the regime." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁶⁵ "Another person I blame [for VE] is the leader in Muslim Brotherhood, Hamzeh Mansour, who incited and urged Jordanians to use violence against the Jordanian government." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

⁶⁶ Talk to Al Jazeera 2013. 'Hamza Mansour: the street is not calm', Al Jazeera, January 26, 2013.

⁶⁷ "It's easier to recruit an individual who is organized by Islamic groups since he shares their ideas, which would make it easier to convince him with the extreme Islamic ideology." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

respondent articulated suspicions about the true motives of the MB, equating it with Salafist Quietists and claiming that the organization uses religion simply as a veil for its underlying intentions.⁶⁸

"When the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood movement present ideas of extremism to their affiliates, it will lead to extremism in society. I am scared of the IAF and Muslim Brotherhood movement affiliates number because these groups can become a powerful controlling group. The IAF and Muslim Brotherhood can have an effect on their affiliates by giving them money."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Salafist Quietists have a mixed reception: they are considered a barrier to VE by some and irrationally conservative by others.

Salafist Quietists enjoy reasonable popularity in Ajloun, where they have a notable presence in Anjara (Ajloun district), Ibbin (Sakhras district), Kufranjah district, Sakhras town (Sakhras district), Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district), and Ajloun City. This popularity is especially notable in comparison with that of other Islamist groups in the governorate. At the same time, however, the movement appears to divide society. This was evident in quantitative results, which indicated that, while 43 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support, 41 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Salafist Quietists in their community (see Figure 2). In fact, there was little enthusiasm for the movement among DI respondents, whose objections to it were wide-ranging. For example, one respondent's aversion to Salafist Quietists was based predominantly on a perception that the movement constitutes a societal irritant, and although harmless, is excessively conservative.⁶⁹ Other respondents' objections to Salafist Quietists appeared to stem, in part, from an inability to distinguish them from Salafist Jihadists. Meanwhile, those most hostile toward Salafist Quietists suggested that the movement encourages VE and serves as a gateway to VEO recruitment.⁷⁰ In fact, there is evidence to support such accusations. For example, two Salafist Quietists who were known to have frequented Salah Al Din Mosque on Qal'aa street in Ajloun City defected to the Salafist Jihadist movement, from which they are currently reported to be trying to recruit from their former movement in the same mosque.

On the other hand, the few positive remarks about Salafist Quietists emphasized their potential as a barrier to VE. This view was based on the movement's supposed religious decorum,⁷¹ but also its active religious campaigning. For example, several respondents explained that Salafist Quietists are active in mosques, neighborhoods, parks, and even people's homes. Two mosques especially associated with the movement are Al Gharbi Mosque, located in Al Hashemiyyah; and Salah Al Din Mosque, located on Qal'aa street in Ajloun City. Here, as elsewhere, Salafist Quietists share their religious interpretations with

⁶⁸ "These groups [the MB and Salafist Quietists] are full of lies and they use the religion as a cover or a face for themselves. I believe that these groups ease the way for youth to become terrorists." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁶⁹ "Salafists [Quietists] hang on to the script. Salafists make a big deal out of stupid things." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

⁷⁰ "Salafist Quietists are the origin of extremism, and they act as a gateway for recruiting young people." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

⁷¹ "The preaching Salafists [Quietists] have a clear idea. I don't think that they're a pathway [to VEOs]. On the contrary, they take them [their followers] away from extremism." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

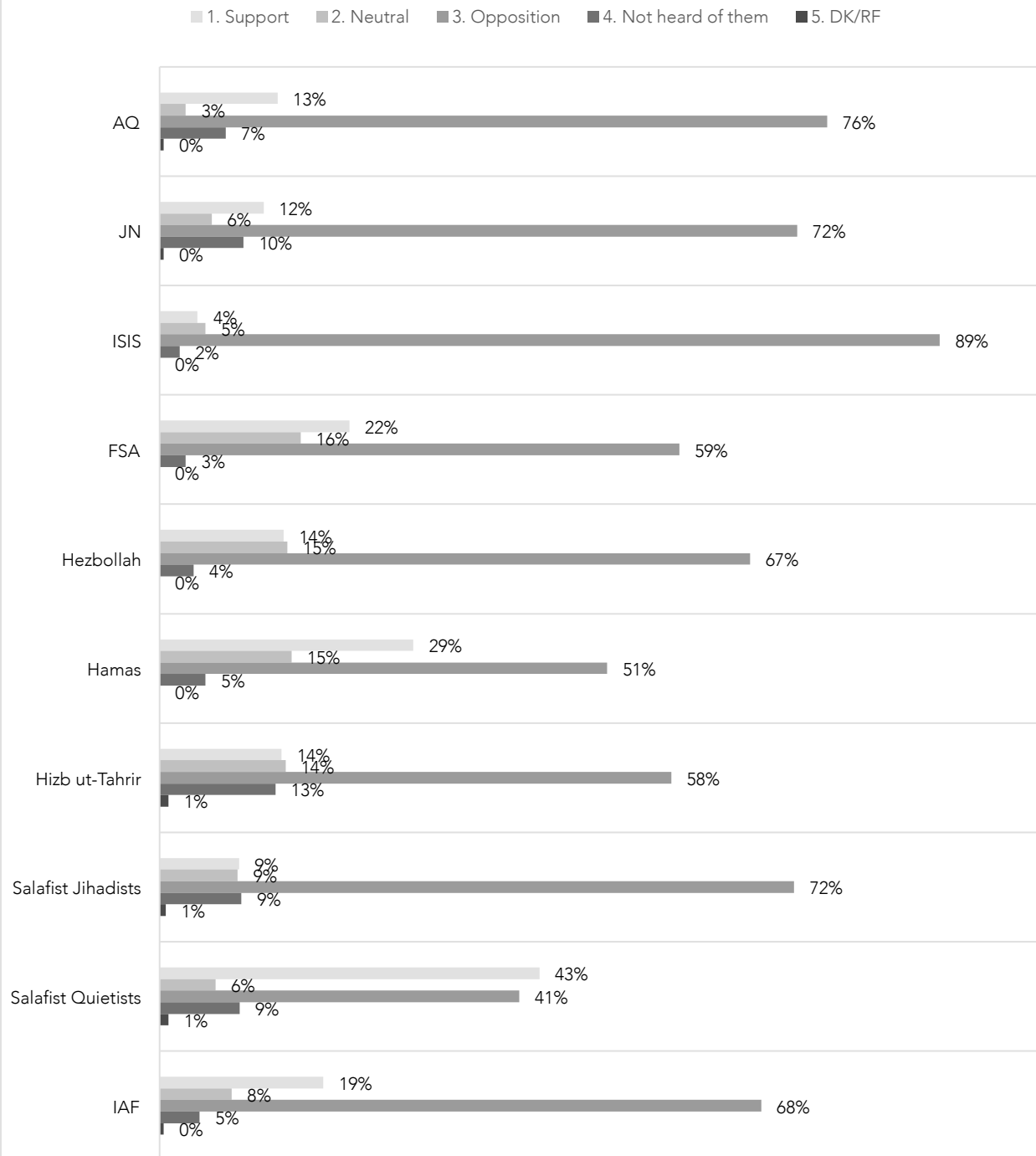
the public, apparently with benign intentions.⁷² They also seek to remind people of their religious duties according to the five pillars of Islam, dedicating particular attention to prompting youth to perform their daily prayers. Some local individuals associated with the movement are particularly revered for their supposed positive influence on local youth. One such figure is the late Sheikh A'wad, who was reportedly a tireless campaigner that made important contributions to improving youth awareness. Among other means, this was achieved through regular lectures directly addressing topics relating to VEOs and terrorism.

"People of Da'wa [Salafist Quietists]: Their job is to spread awareness and educate people about Islam. They visit houses and influence people. There's a sheikh named A'wad: he's dead now. He visited every mosque in Jordan – not only in Ajloun – and he had a very important role in keeping young people away from extremism and terrorism [...] he used to lecture young people about extremist groups and terrorism every Friday."

(Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

⁷² "These groups [peaceful Islamist groups] try to spread awareness for people about the true religion. I didn't deal with the Muslim Brotherhood, but Al Da'wa group [Salafist Quietists] tries to impact people positively." (Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

Figure 2: To what extent do you think there is support or opposition for the following groups in your community?

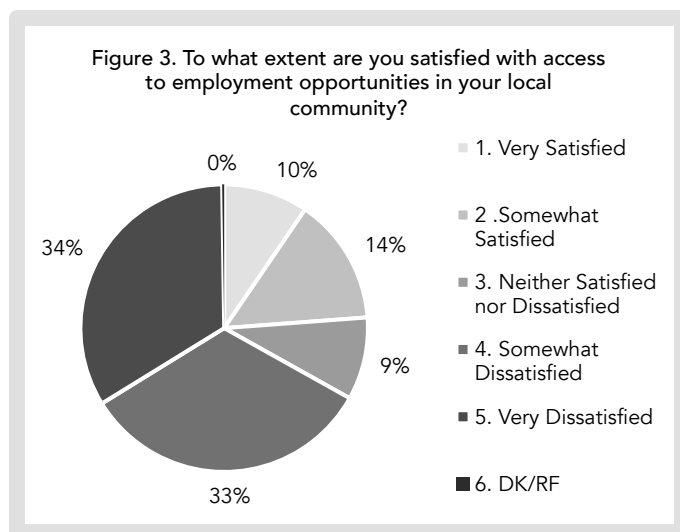


3.0 BASIC NEEDS DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

3.1 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

High unemployment is leaving increasing numbers of young men receptive to the financial incentives of VEO recruitment.

In terms of wealth and employment rates, Ajloun features toward the lower end among Jordan's 12 governorates.⁷³ This is inherent in a poverty rate of around 26 percent, as well as an unemployment rate of approximately 19 percent in the second quarter of 2016 – the highest of all Jordan's governorates.⁷⁴ Unemployment and poverty in Ajloun is predominantly concentrated in suburban villages and towns, which respondents also associated with the highest levels of VE.⁷⁵ This includes Anjara (Ajloun district), Balas (Kufranjah district), Safeenah (Kufranjah district), Rasoun (Orjan district), Orjan town (Orjan district), Baoun town (Orjan district), Awsara village (Orjan district), Halawah town (Ajloun district), Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district), Wahdanah (Ajloun district) Ibbin (Sakhrah district) and Sakhrah town (Sakhrah district). The Jordanian regime has recognized Ajloun's struggling economic performance and has duly vowed to implement development projects, improve infrastructure services and create job opportunities in the governorate.⁷⁶ With that in mind, locals are keenly aware of increasing unemployment in both the public and private sector, as well as the consequent fall in household incomes. This is predominantly due to a lack of employment opportunities. For example, Ajloun has an exceptionally high number of unemployed teaching graduates due to a shortage of teaching posts. Likewise, hospitals and health centers are reportedly refusing to hire medical graduates, most likely due to a lack of financial resources. Engineering graduates are also exhibiting high unemployment rates as demand in the engineering sector is exceeding supply. These observations were echoed in quantitative findings, which revealed that 67 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied, while only 24 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied with employment opportunities in their local community (see Figure 3). Such scarce local opportunities are inducing some residents to seek work in Amman, thus incurring high



⁷³ Aburumman, Mohammad 2016. 'The situation in Ajloun!', Al Ghad, May 23, 2016.

⁷⁴ Department of Statistics 2016. '14.7% the unemployment rate during the second quarter of 2016', The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, July 26, 2016.

⁷⁵ "Villages are the most targeted areas [by VEOs]. Villages are a breeding environment [for VE] because of the poverty and unemployment that would lead youth to extremism." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

⁷⁶ The Jordan Times 2016. 'Mulki announces package of job generation projects in Ajloun', The Jordan Times, September 04, 2016.

transportation expenses. This phenomenon is reportedly noticeable among Kufranjah's population.⁷⁷ For some, increasing unemployment has coincided with an increase in VE. Indeed, Ajloun's poor economic conditions are likely to produce a heightened receptivity to VEO recruitment packages, which typically include reasonable financial rewards. Many respondents confirmed this, asserting that it is young unemployed men – typically aged between 18 and 35 – with low incomes who are most disposed to these incentives.⁷⁸ As the case study below indicates, these financial dynamics are often the primary driver of VEO recruitment.⁷⁹

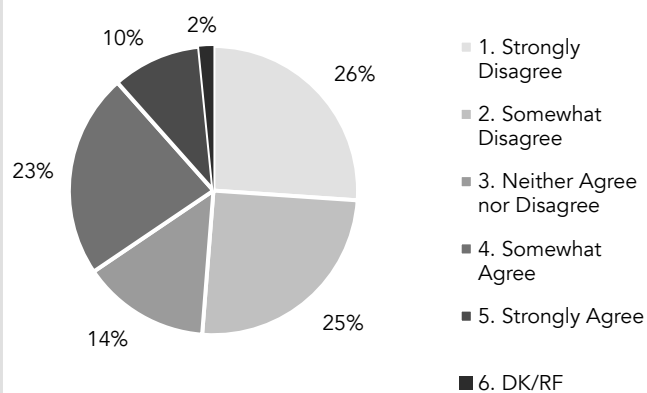
"VE has become a huge problem amid lack of job creation in the public and private sector. Unemployment and poverty are on the rise, with a decrease in monthly income for many households."

(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

VEOs and Salafist Jihadists have a reputation as generous financial providers, thus strengthening their appeal to the economically strained.

The risk of locals being seduced by the benefits offered by VEOs and Salafist Jihadists is amplified by the fact that many are highly aware of them. Indeed, there are indications that, regardless of their relative approval ratings, VEOs and Salafist Jihadists have achieved a reputation among locals as socio-economically munificent institutions.⁸⁰ ISIS in particular has a reputation among locals for offering generous pay packages to its recruits.⁸¹ Furthermore, whether true or not, there are rumors in Ajloun – sparked by investigations in Zarqa – that, once recruited, individuals are eligible for bonuses if they can persuade their peers to join the organization

Figure 4. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad is an easy way to earn money?



⁷⁷ "Poor areas such as Kufranjah suffer from a lack of projects and job opportunities. Therefore, youth are forced to work in Amman, which is not going to be beneficial for them since they have to spend most of their salaries on transportations costs." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁷⁸ "Unemployed youth who are experiencing economical difficulties are the perfect target for recruiters." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

⁷⁹ "Our bad financial situation was the most effective factor that pushed my husband to join extremist groups." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁸⁰ "These groups [VEOs] give you principles to fight for, they increase your self-esteem, they make you feel different, [and] they educate you and give you everything you lack in your country." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

⁸¹ "Money is important because ISIS recruits through money. They pay large amounts of money for people to join; a soldier fighting with ISIS might get 3,000 JD per month." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

as well.⁸² That many locals recognize VEO enrollment as a potentially lucrative undertaking was implicit in quantitative findings. 33 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 51 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad is an easy way to earn money. Significantly, an additional 14 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 4). In addition to financial benefits, there are suggestions that membership of Salafist Jihadist groups can provide accommodation for needy individuals. One respondent, for instance, explained that many of the locals who join the Salafist Jihadist current are economically dependent, which could explain their participation in Salafist Jihadist preaching groups.⁸³ Here, they receive free accommodation in the mosques that they visit – usually staying for three to four days before moving on. One local from Sakhrāh district who joined such a group is known to have been unemployed and living on benefits, the latter of which continued to be provided by local Salafist Jihadists themselves until he later joined ISIS.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, there are indications that the benefits of VEO membership extend beyond the individual, often profiting the recruit's family as well. Such was true of the Jaysh Al Islam (JI) recruit featuring in the case study presented below.⁸⁵ In this case, the recruit was receiving approximately one thousand Jordanian Dinars (JD) per month – compared with his previous salary of 250 JDs per month – half of which he sent to his family. This transfer was achieved through discreet physical exchanges.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, there were suggestions that VEOs are also wise to the economic circumstances of their prospective recruits,⁸⁷ thereby enabling them to channel incentives accordingly, sometimes via social media. The experience of one local man illustrates this phenomenon. Having fallen into poverty and struggling to acquire basic necessities, the individual's acquaintances noticed that he began showing increasing signs of Islamic extremism. Meanwhile, he had begun communicating with a VEO on social media, whereby he was offered a substantial financial reward for joining the group. It was only after a relative intervened that these pursuits were aborted.⁸⁸

⁸² "In Zarqa' there were investigations, and they showed that some of the Jordanian fighters from clans in Jordan were paid 2500 JD per month to join ISIS. And they used to bring along their friends in order to get more money and more followers." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁸³ "What's known about the people who join the Salafist Jihadists is that they are people who live on the preaching campaigns – on support, and most of them live on support. Of course their economic situation is bad." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

⁸⁴ "The guy was living on aid and support, [including from] from Salafist Jihadists, before he joined Daesh. Unemployed people get tempted." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

⁸⁵ "Every once in a while he used to send us money that we used to spend. He used to send me 300 to 500 JDs." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁸⁶ "Someone used to come to my house and tell me, 'Your husband has sent you this money.' I asked him who he was. He told me that he was a relative of one of my husband's friends and would refuse to tell me anything further – not even the name of my husband's friend." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁸⁷ "In terms of my husband, [Jaysh Al Islam] tempted him with money since they knew that his financial situation was not that good." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

⁸⁸ "I have a friend who is having economic difficulties. He couldn't satisfy his family's needs. We notice that he started to become a fundamentalist, especially when we talked about Islam. After a while, we knew that he was talking with an extremist group via social media; the group tried to convince him to leave and join them by promising to give him a huge amount of money." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

"When an extremist group offers a person a huge amount of money in exchange for a favour – which is joining and fighting with them for a period of time with a probability of returning – this person might accept the offer. They don't say that you might never return when they make the deal. But they say that you will fight with them and they will pay you a huge amount of money that you never dreamt of having."

(Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Focus: The allure of financial rewards drives a local farmer into the ranks of Jaysh Al Islam.

"My husband went to fight with Jaysh Al Islam four years ago and was injured. He then returned to Jordan and was locked up for two years. Before joining, my husband was just like anybody else here. He worked in agriculture on land that was warrantied by someone [else]. Our situation was stable, meaning that we were living with not all of our needs and desires available. However, all people here live like this. Ever since the events in Syria began he started acting different. At first, he didn't have any friends or anything but his work, meaning that he went from home to work and from work to home. He started having friends whom he went out with. He started coming home late. He also started neglecting his work in agriculture, and sometimes he would leave us [for] two or three days at a time, saying that he was with his friends and that they were working on a project that would improve our financial status. He even started having money and bought a new cell phone. He subscribed to the Internet and made a few renovations in the house. I used to ask him from where all this money came and he told me that it came from the project that he wants to start with his friends. Of course I never thought that he would join [JI], even after he started growing his beard and bringing books that he read all night long. He left [to join JI] without telling me anything, and when he came back, he told me that the situation in reality is crime, murder, and scenery that aches the heart. One time he told me that he was going to Ramtha [Irbid] as usual. But he was a week late, so I tried to call him but he didn't answer. I kept calling him for two days and still no answer until someone finally answered and told me that, 'your husband went with his friends to Lebanon'. I wondered why he hadn't told me. So I asked him when my husband would return. He told me that he didn't know and immediately hung up. Two days later, my husband calls me and tells me that he is in Syria. I asked him why, and he told me that he was fighting with JI so that they can evict the Americans from Syria."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

While an overwhelming dependence on public sector employment serves as a barrier to VE, Syrian refugees are overcrowding the private sector and creating economic grievances.

Government-related grievances have proven to be one of the main drivers of VE and VEO support in Jordan. Indeed, VEOs have attempted to aggravate and capitalize on anti-government grievances in order to present themselves as benign alternatives (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist

Narratives). Thus, Ajloun's strong ties to the government are a likely explanation for the governorates relative lack of violent extremism. These ties are facilitated by the population's overwhelming dependence on the public sector,⁸⁹ with an estimated 55,000 locals working in the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF).⁹⁰ The flipside of this, however, is that, because Ajloun's private sector is so small, the increasing demand for employment following the arrival of Syrian refugees into the governorate has been intensified.⁹¹ Indeed, although to a lesser extent than the northern governorates of Mafrqa and Irbid, Ajloun has absorbed a substantial influx of Syrian refugees since the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011-2012. For example, as of February 2016, 31 percent of Jordan's urban-based Syrian refugees were living in Irbid, Jarash and Ajloun,⁹² with the latter hosting approximately 14,500 Syrian refugees in 2015.⁹³ Furthermore, it is not only the increased demand that risks squeezing locals out of the private sector, but also the fact that Syrian refugees are known to work for lower salaries than their Jordanian counterparts, often undercutting the national minimum wage of approximately 190 JD. At the same time, respondents reported that Syrian refugees are generally better qualified than their Jordanian counterparts in many (mainly vocational) occupations, thereby providing an additional reason for employers to favor them. Indeed, as explained by several respondents, employers – notably in the catering industry – are choosing to hire Syrian workers over Jordanian locals.⁹⁴

Though efforts have been made to increase private sector job growth, locals have not noticed, leading many to despair.

Consistent with falling wages are the increasing complaints relating to income difficulties in Ajloun. One respondent, for example, claimed that, for many, their salaries are insufficient to sustain them until the end of the month.⁹⁵ Compounding any indignation resulting from financial strains is frustration among locals at what are considered excessive tax rates.⁹⁶ These feelings of injustice are likely to feed into a common perception that hard work is not appreciated. This was reflected by quantitative data, which indicated that 51 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 39 percent

⁸⁹ "Most people in Ajloun work in the army. There is a social commitment to the government because many of the people work with the government." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁹⁰ "Most of Ajloun's inhabitants work in security, with a recent survey showing that 55 thousand people are in the armed forces. I believe no extremist group can penetrate those people." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

⁹¹ "We are talking about five to 10 percent of the population who have jobs in the private sector; the private sector in Ajloun is very low. So if new competition comes, as [with the] Syrians, they will take the Jordanian's opportunities in this sector." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁹² UNHCR 2016. 'Factsheet', UNHCR, Jordan Field Office Irbid, March 2016.

⁹³ Jordan's Department of Statistics 2015. 'Jordan's refugee population by province, 2015', Jordan's Department of Statistics, October 12, 2016.

⁹⁴ "Most of the businesses are hiring Syrians instead of Jordanians since the Syrian worker accepts less money to work than the Jordanian. This creates a competition in the job market. Most of the restaurants are hiring Syrians instead of Jordanians." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

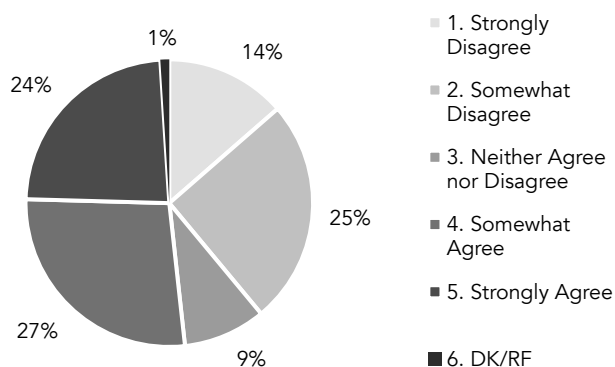
⁹⁵ "People's salaries are only enough for half of the month." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

⁹⁶ "Most of the people object to paying so many taxes while not getting high salaries." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the people who work the hardest are never rewarded the most (see Figure 5).

There have been some efforts to address Ajloun's private sector employment deficit, such as the work conducted by the regime-sponsored Irada organization,⁹⁷ which King Abdullah II established in order to support small to medium private sector businesses across the country.⁹⁸ The organization has an office in downtown Ajloun City, from where it has implemented a training program for 60 local graduates in order to prepare them for private sector work. In addition, the organization has delivered numerous lectures in Ajloun, centered on the need to absorb young people into small-medium enterprises.

Figure 5. To what extent do you agree that the people who work the hardest are never rewarded the most?



"The refugee would accept less money to work than a citizen, which increased unemployment between citizens. Let's assume that a business owner pays a Jordanian employee 350 JDs. A Syrian would accept 50 JDs for the same job. The business owner would be happy to cut his costs by hiring a Syrian instead of a Jordanian to increase his profit. Now we have more poverty and unemployment."

(Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Increasing sexual and marital frustration resulting from economic pressures is a significant driving factor of VEO membership.

Mounting financial strains are inducing some locals to adopt particular coping strategies. One example is that some young men are reportedly opting to marry Syrian girls over Jordanian locals as the former demand a cheaper dowry than the latter.⁹⁹ Indeed, an increasing difficulty to afford marriage may be attracting some individuals to VEOs such as ISIS, which notoriously offer their recruits access to girls and/or marriage.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the obstacles of securing marriage, an absence of sexual outlets for men is deemed a major VEO recruitment factor among respondents.¹⁰¹ Both of these are phenomena that VEOs – notably ISIS – have actively exploited in order to attract young men into their ranks. Indeed,

⁹⁷ "Irada, has a program that supports unemployed young people by providing them with the technical support and training to start their own little or medium projects." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁹⁸ Irada, accessed October 12, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.irada.org.jo/>>

⁹⁹ "Now there are Jordanian men who prefer Syrian women over Jordanian women because of high dowries." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

¹⁰⁰ Hilburn, Matthew 2014. 'IS militants use sex to lure recruits', VOA News, December 21, 2014.

¹⁰¹ "Personal motives [for fighting in Syria] include sex and women – that is, getting married and being able to have sex." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

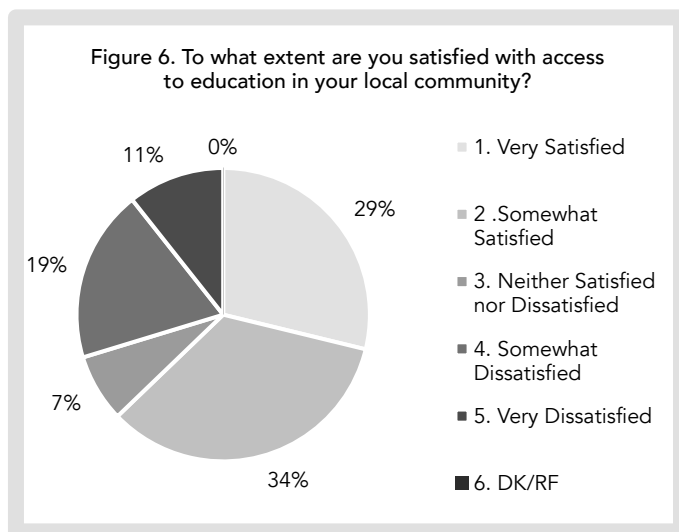
ISIS has incorporated its infamous provision of sex slaves as a significant component of its media propaganda campaigns.¹⁰² This has been supplemented by the organization's numerous attempts to provide Islamic justification for sex slavery. For example, in December 2014, ISIS' Research and Fatwa Department released a pamphlet stating that, according to Sharia law, it is permissible to trade and have sexual intercourse with non-Muslim slaves.¹⁰³ Likewise, in the ninth issue of its online magazine, Dabiq, ISIS included an article dedicated to an Islamic argument in favor of sex slavery.¹⁰⁴ It may be no coincidence then that the areas of Ajloun most closely associated with VE and VEO sympathies are those with exceptionally fragile male-female relationship bonds. As one respondent explained, Anjara (Ajloun district) – known for its accommodation of many Salafist Jihadists (see section 5.4 Exposure to VE and Perceptions of VEO Threat) – has remarkably high divorce rates.¹⁰⁵

"Extremist groups use sex to encourage youth to fight with them; most of ISIS' affiliates joined because of sex."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

There are concerns about deteriorating standards of education in schools, but education per se does not constitute a barrier to VE.

Quantitative findings revealed that most residents consider local education services to be adequate. For example, 63 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied, while 30 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with access to education in their local community (see Figure 6). Meanwhile, however, DI respondents discussed some of the issues accounting for this significant minority of dissatisfaction. One respondent claimed that the quality of education in Ajloun's schools is regressing, and that many teachers are unqualified.¹⁰⁶ This is despite an abundance of unemployed teaching graduates (see above). There were corresponding calls among respondents for the government to prioritize the



¹⁰² Engel, Pamela 2015. 'ISIS is recruiting in the most perverse way imaginable', Business Insider, August 13, 2015.

¹⁰³ The Middle East Media Research Institute 2014. 'Islamic State (ISIS) releases pamphlet on female slaves', MEMRI, December 04, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Dabiq 2015. 'They plot and Allah plots', Dabiq, Issue 09, May 21, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ "Anjara has a high percentage of unemployment and divorce cases and polygamy. They have many broken families." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

¹⁰⁶ "The government should monitor teachers and follow them. Education is becoming worse; anyone can become a teacher now." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

development of the local school system in order to prevent it from deteriorating further. In fact, some areas within Ajloun emerged as particularly renowned for their poor education facilities. This includes Orjan town (Orjan district), Ibbin (Sakhras district), Sakhras town (Sakhras district) and the Al Ishara area (Anjara, Ajloun district).

Perhaps recognizing that these locations are also among Ajloun's VE hotspots, most respondents were of the impression that education constitutes a barrier to VE and VEO sympathies.¹⁰⁷ However, several observations contradict this assumption. For example, one group of local youths that attempted to travel to ISIS territory via Turkey was reportedly well educated. In another case, an educated graduate – probably an engineer – joined ISIS after being persuaded by a close friend.¹⁰⁸ These instances have disturbed a number of locals, who may have believed education to provide immunity to radicalization. For example, the experience of these individuals served as a wake-up call to one respondent regarding the considerable capacity of VEOs to penetrate local communities.¹⁰⁹

"[The government] should focus on education because it is failing our youth. If education continues to be as bad as it is, we will start getting doctors and engineers from outside the country."

(Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

A lack of religious education leaves young people susceptible to adopting extreme Islamic interpretations.

Numerous preachers within Ajloun are known to have been promoting Islam according to their own interpretations. In some cases, these interpretations have borne resemblance to extremist ideas (see section 7.1 The Role of Violent Extremism Propaganda). Depending on their various inclinations, these preachers' congregations are liable to adopt VE attitudes. Significantly, it is typically those with the least awareness of Islam in the first instance that are most likely to be convinced by extremist interpretations. This renders young, religiously ignorant members of the congregation particularly vulnerable.¹¹⁰ Many respondents confirmed this, implying that those with the poorest understanding of the Qur'an are the most receptive to extremist interpretations of the text.¹¹¹ These respondents added that local youths are extremely eager to feel part of an Islamic movement regardless of their capacity to judge its principles.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ "Education helps people to understand the right and wrong. Low education rates would lead to extremism." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹⁰⁸ "I heard from a friend about someone who had no money and is now fighting with ISIS. He was educated; he was an engineer, I guess. His best friend convinced him." (Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

¹⁰⁹ "There are even a few educated and conscious youths who adopted the Daesh ideology in Ajloun. There was once a group of youths who enjoyed the experience; they were manipulated to travel to Turkey, but ironically returned without doing anything. In terms of influence, violent Salafism, Daesh [ISIS] and pro-Daesh are the most dangerous." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

¹¹⁰ "The recipients [of extremist preaching] ignorance and lack of awareness plays a role [in the development of VE] as well." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹¹¹ "Many people do not have the right understanding of [the] Qur'an; that's why they [VEOs] can manipulate its meaning in order to convince people." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

¹¹² "The youth join any Islamic thought regardless [of whether] they understood it correctly." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Testament to these observations is the experience of two youths from Anjara (Ajloun district) who attempted – but nevertheless failed – to join ISIS in Syria. According to locals, neither of these individuals were devout Muslims – they did not even attend the local mosque. Apparently, this enabled them to be easily “brainwashed” by their recruiters. For example, one of the youths was communicating with an ISIS operative via Facebook, where the latter successfully convinced him that he was failing to observe “true Islam.” The ISIS operative reportedly told him that, unless he adopted a particular interpretation of Islam – presumably that of ISIS – he would not be granted access to heaven.

“If a person had a strict religious background and had a wrong interpretation of religion in the first place, [they] could be affected [by VE]. However, if a person was a follower of true religion and Islam, he would definitely not be affected.”

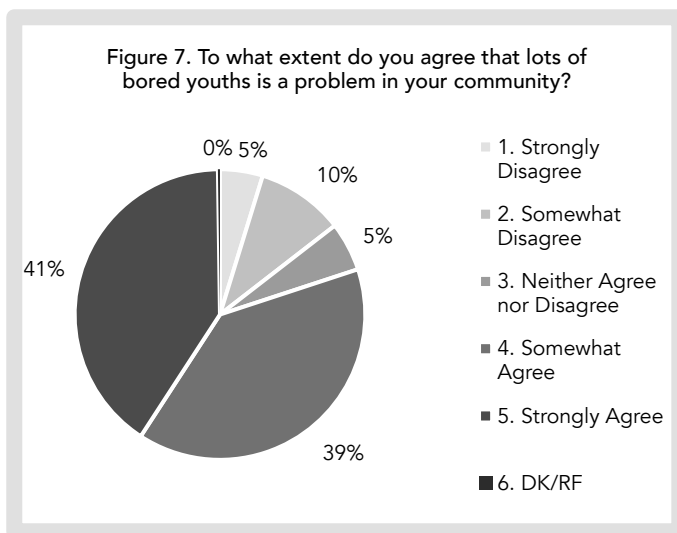
(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

3.2 UTILITIES AND SERVICES

A lack of youth facilities and consequent idleness is driving young people into delinquency and increasing their susceptibility to VEO recruitment.

Ajloun has a number of facilities that respondents singled out as especially effective in positively preoccupying young people and nurturing responsible citizens. These include Al Hadariyah village park (located beside Ajloun College University), Al Sidiq Restaurant (located in Ayn Al Bustan, Kufranjah district), Lilyano Restaurant, Al Qal'aa Restaurant (both located near the entrance to Ajloun City, close to Ajloun College University), Al Reem Restaurant (located in Ajloun city center), Abu Al Izz Café (located in Ajloun city center), Ajloun Youth Center, Kufranjah Youth Center, Ibbin Sports Club, Kufranjah Sports Club, and Ajloun Scout Camp. That said, the scope of their impact is

limited. For example, in identifying the causes of anti-social behavior among local youth, several respondents deplored the lack of recreational facilities in Ajloun, which they related to the governorate's general socio-economic neglect.¹¹³ This is particularly concerning considering Ajloun's exceptional levels of unemployment and thus potential for youth idleness, the latter of which was captured in quantitative findings, which indicated that an overwhelming 80 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while only 15 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that lots of bored youths is a problem in their community (see Figure 7). Several respondents explained that idle youth constitute the cohort that is most likely to invest time browsing through online VEO material, which has proven effective in generating support for VEOs (see section 7.1 The Role of Violent Extremism Propaganda). Likewise, many respondents included idle youth when identifying those cohorts most susceptible to radicalization. As several respondents articulated, if youth are provided with alternative means of preoccupation – namely local employment – they are unlikely to consider the possibility of aligning themselves with VEOs.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, some respondents called on the government dedicate more resources to Ajloun in order to convince locals that it is attentive to their needs.¹¹⁵



¹¹³ "Ajloun City needs more official attention and support to build more places for youth, such as centers and sports places." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹¹⁴ "If youth can find a job close to where they live, they won't even think about leaving to join any [VEO]." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹¹⁵ "The government has to activate youth clubs; they have to schedule political and social lectures. They have to show us that they are not sleeping. They have to show us that they care about corruption, unemployment and emptiness." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

"The victims [VEO recruits] are usually people aged 18 to 30, who are suffering from excessive leisure time. They are usually approached through social media, sometimes face-to-face."

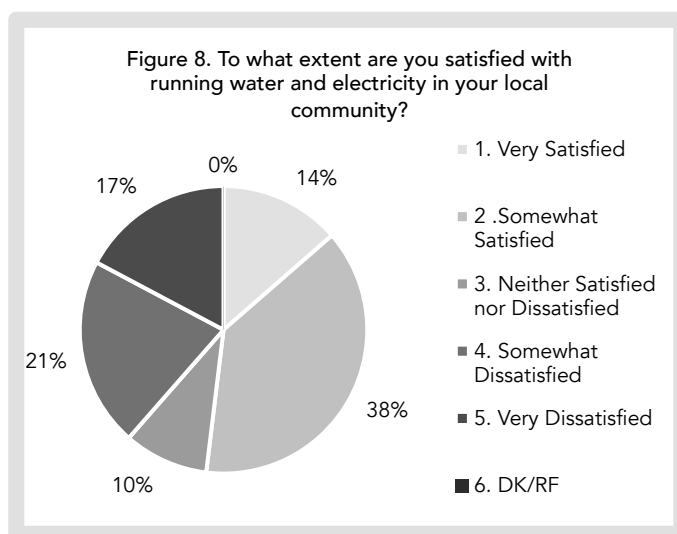
(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

Water and electricity services have deteriorated following the influx of Syrian refugees into Ajloun.

Some respondents reported deterioration in the quality and supply of water and electricity services in Ajloun. With reference to the pressures accompanying the arrival of considerable numbers of refugees into the country, one respondent bemoaned the dramatic increase in prices for these services.¹¹⁶

This price inflation is likely to continue as the government implements the policies consistent with the conditions of a July 2016 International Monetary Fund loan.¹¹⁷ Several other respondents complained about the water quality and service delivery, which is reportedly prone to frequent failure.¹¹⁸ Consequently, some households have gone without water for several weeks.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, Ajloun's water

supply provided by tanks is undrinkable due to a lack of purification. Despite these findings, the majority of residents appear to be content with the quality of local water and electricity services. As revealed in quantitative findings, 52 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied, while 38 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with running water and electricity in their local community (see Figure 8). These minorities are most likely to be located in some of Ajloun's poorest areas, where water and electricity services are at their worst. This includes Nimer neighborhood (Kufranjah), Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district), Wahdanah (Ajloun district), Halawah town (Ajloun district), Ibbin (Sakhras district), Orjan district, and Kufranjah district. It is in these areas that relations between the public and the municipality are likely to be especially fragile, as it is the municipality's responsibility to deliver water services among other tasks. The manager of Ajloun Water, Muntasir Al Momani, is a particular cause of frustration among locals, who have made explicit appeals to him for an improvement



¹¹⁶ "Even though we have limited resources, Jordan opened its door for neighboring countries and gave them the same rights as Jordanians. There's an increase in electricity and water prices. If we go back 20 years, the prices have increased by 400 percent." (Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

¹¹⁷ The Economist 2016. 'The uneasy crown', The Economist, October 22, 2016.

¹¹⁸ "Water and electricity are weak, and sometimes they get cut off." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

¹¹⁹ "The load on services such as water and electricity is very high. Some houses in Ajloun have been without water for a month." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

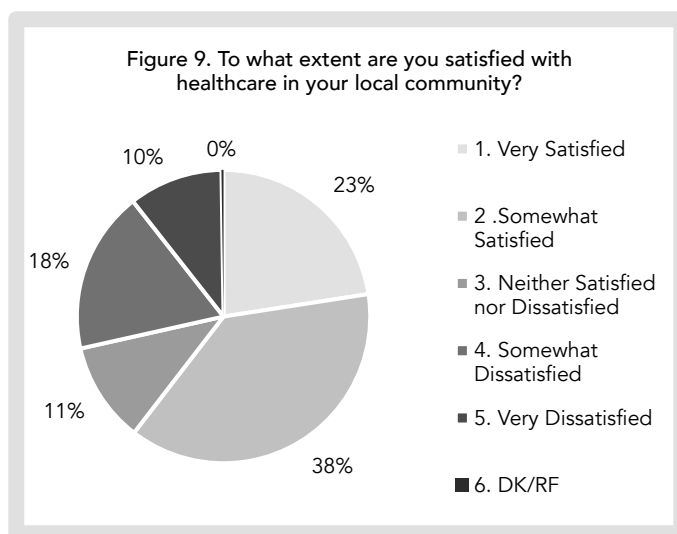
in water services, only to be disappointed. These appeals were made through the TV show, *Happening Today*, where locals voiced their dissatisfaction with frequent water shortages in their locality, only to be told by Al Momani that improvement would be too costly. Locals have also expressed their discontent with water and electricity services through the popular radio channel, the *Al Wakil Show*, broadcast on the Rotana station. Meanwhile, the central government has become a major source of local grievances due to apparently quite sudden dramatic electricity price hikes from 12 JD per month to 29 JD per month in 2016. Although the government is reportedly subsidizing this cost, locals nonetheless deem it excessively expensive.

"As to the electricity bill, it is considered high to many people, especially since the economic and financial situation of the people of Ajloun is not good. And people started to feel the electricity price increase suddenly, although the government never announced I [...] although there is governmental support for part of the electricity bill, it is still considered high to many people."

(Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

Despite being under-resourced, the majority is satisfied with health services, though poverty pockets are disproportionately disadvantaged.

61 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied, while 28 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with healthcare in their community (see Figure 9). However, despite these high levels of contentment, there are several indications that Ajloun suffers from an inadequate supply of medical facilities, including healthcare centers and hospitals. Indeed, until October 2016, the governorate had just one hospital – Al Eman Governmental Hospital, located in Ajloun City Center – to serve its entire population. According to field researchers, this was insufficient to cope with the scale of demand.¹²⁰ Furthermore, there are



complaints that even this hospital is poorly managed and resourced, delivering inefficient services and employing unqualified staff. Additionally, the facility, along with healthcare centers, is apparently short-staffed, unable to expand its workforce due to financial constraints.¹²¹ Thus, the king's October 2016 inauguration of a new 150-bed mixed-sex hospital in the governorate – the Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein

¹²⁰ "We only have one hospital in Ajloun, and this hospital is not able to service the numbers of patients coming from all over Ajloun." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

¹²¹ "The truth is [that] they [hospitals and healthcare centers] do not have enough money to pay the salaries of their employees, even though there is a shortage of staff and weakness in services in Al Eman Governmental Hospital." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

Military Hospital – is likely to be enthusiastically welcomed by the local population.¹²² Probably most affected by poor health services in Ajloun is Orjan district, which is also reportedly one of the poorest areas in the entire country. The substandard service delivery to Orjan is partly due to its location, as it lies approximately 30 kilometers (about 19 miles) from Ajloun City. This is compounded by the fact that the district is known for its particularly poor public transport services. Ibbin (Sakhray district) and Al Hashemiyyah are two more of Ajloun’s poverty pockets that are also plagued by poor health and sanitation services. For example, Al Hashemiyyah is reportedly neglected by sewage services altogether. Consequently, there is sewage water running through its streets, leading to a higher risk of diseases.

“The hospital is not qualified to serve the patients. In Ajloun, this hospital works very slowly and deficiently. There are no qualified doctors or [adequate] equipment. Once, a man went to the hospital due a headache, and the doctor made a mistake and gave him a pill that forces the birth, even though he's a man. We need the government to build more specialized hospitals in Ajloun governorate.

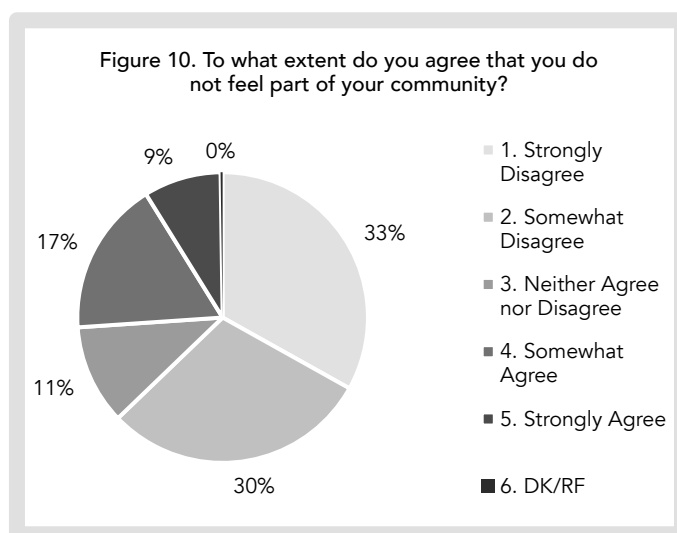
(Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

¹²² The Jordan Times 2016. ‘New military hospital to serve residents of Ajloun, Jarash’, The Jordan Times, October 21, 2016.

3.3 ECONOMY, HOUSING AND DEBT

Perceived socio-economic inequality and marginalization is increasing youth susceptibility to VEO recruitment.

Compared with Jordan's other governorates, Ajloun has some of the lowest levels of economic inequality.¹²³ Yet, respondents expressed frustrations relating to a perceived income gap within the governorate¹²⁴ and related this to social fragmentation. Indeed, a considerable 26 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 63 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that they do not feel part of their community. Significantly, 11 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that they do not feel part of their community, implying that their sense of social cohesion is at best in doubt (see Figure 10). Among this disaffected minority is likely to be Ajloun's



small West Bank population concentrated in Anjara (Ajloun district) and Kufranjah. This is predominantly because they are generally unaffiliated with local tribes. As a consequence, they do not enjoy tribal privileges, including those relating to employment. For example, Ajloun's West Bank residents will often accept a lower salary than their Jordanian counterparts because they lack the support of the tribe, which is capable of ensuring that employers treat their tribal kin appropriately. Accordingly, 45 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 37 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem in their community. Meanwhile, a considerable 18 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 11).

At the same time, a substantial proportion of Ajloun's population believes that VEOs foster strong social support systems that could rival those offered by tribes. Indeed, 36 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 49 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that members of VEOs always look after each other. Once again however, many respondents were indecisive on this issue: 12 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that members of VEOs always look after each other (see Figure 12). Thus, harboring an understanding of VEOs as economically and socially supportive (see section 3.1 Education and Employment), respondents voiced concerns that socially marginalized local youth are particularly at risk of recruitment into these groups.

¹²³ UNDP & UNICEF 2015. 'Socio-economic inequality in Jordan', UNDP & UNICEF. 2015.

¹²⁴ "We have to offer job opportunities for these people; we have to decrease the gap between the rich and the poor." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

"The weakness of social unity also causes some young people to leave their families and join these groups for easy money."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

Figure 11. To what extent do you agree that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem in your community?

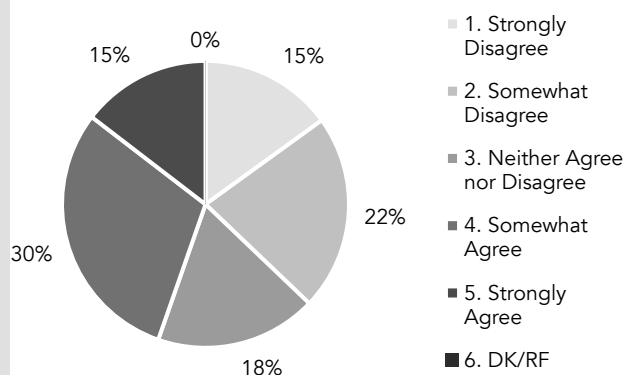
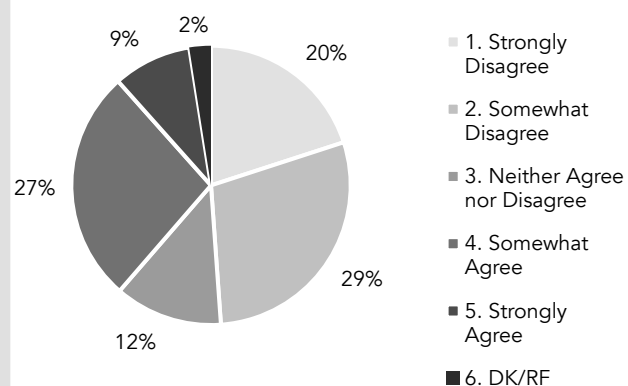


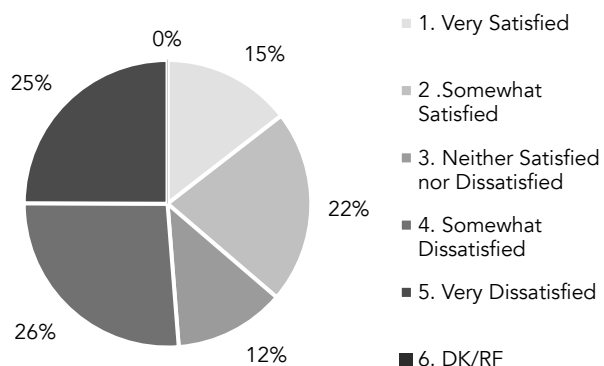
Figure 12. To what extent do you agree that members of VEOs always look after each other?



Prices for housing rents and basic necessities are increasing in response to growing demand from Syrian refugees, aggravating already high levels of debt.

Many respondents complained that since Syrian refugees began entering the governorate in high numbers from around 2012, there has been a perceptible increase in accommodation rental prices. Indeed, in many cases, rents have more than doubled, from an average of around 70 JD to 150 JD or more. This has particularly affected areas hosting the largest numbers of refugees, most notably Ibbin (Sakhray district). However, the cost of housing is evidently a governorate-wide concern. As revealed in quantitative findings, 51 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied, while 37 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied with access to affordable housing in their local community (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. To what extent are you satisfied with access to affordable housing in your local community?



Some residents were inclined to hold opportunistic landlords responsible for raising rental prices,¹²⁵ and thus supposedly prioritizing housing for higher-paying Syrian refugees. Others placed the blame more squarely on a growing population of refugees.¹²⁶ Indeed, the latter's readiness to live in lesser comfort than their Jordanian counterparts means that multiple Syrian families are living in single houses, thereby pooling their financial resources and pricing out Jordanian families. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are also held accountable for supplementing refugee incomes and thus giving them a perceived advantage in the housing market. In addition, there are concerns of a housing shortage in the governorate for the same reason.¹²⁷ Considering these observations, it is unsurprising that 45 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 40 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that inequality between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem in their community. It is noteworthy also that 15 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 14). Although these housing conditions have materialized relatively quickly, there is a degree of local apprehension about the long-term impact. For example, one respondent predicted that the Syrian refugees who have arrived in Jordan will in the near future become permanent residents. The same respondent also voiced concerns about the consequent demographic transformations that will ensue.¹²⁸

Also afflicting the areas hosting the largest numbers of refugees in Ajloun have been notable increases in the prices of basic necessities, even food and drink. Coinciding with these, housing price inflations are widespread concerns about the extent to which locals are dependent on debt. For example, 75 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 21 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that debt is a problem in their community (see Figure 15). This is especially disconcerting for those recognizing that the seduction of VEO financial incentives is magnified by endemic debt within Ajloun.¹²⁹

"Syrian refugees take support and funding from NGOs, and they are able to pay any rent. House owners even prefer to rent their houses to refugees because they are willing to pay any price."

(Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

¹²⁵ "The owners of houses raised rents, then the young [people] became puzzled with their situation and suffering because of the high rents." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

¹²⁶ "Syrian refugees became a heavyweight; they pushed house rentals above the clouds." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

¹²⁷ "As for the infrastructure, in Ajloun it only fits 140,000 people. In case they are increased by 25,000 people then the locals will have fewer chances to find houses. That makes the rent prices higher and puts enormous pressure on the local general services." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹²⁸ "We are talking about changing Jordan: the birth rate for Jordanians is 2.7, for Syrians its 7.1. What will happen to Jordan after 10 years? In history, all people who seek refuge in other countries never go back. People who came from Afghanistan, Yemen, Palestine, Syria or Iraq will remain." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹²⁹ "He needs to pay the people he owes. When an extremist group [offered] him a huge amount of money in exchange for joining and fighting with them, he would think that he would make a lot of money in one week – so he was going to be a millionaire. That is the way he looked at it." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Figure 14. To what extent do you agree that inequality between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem in your community?

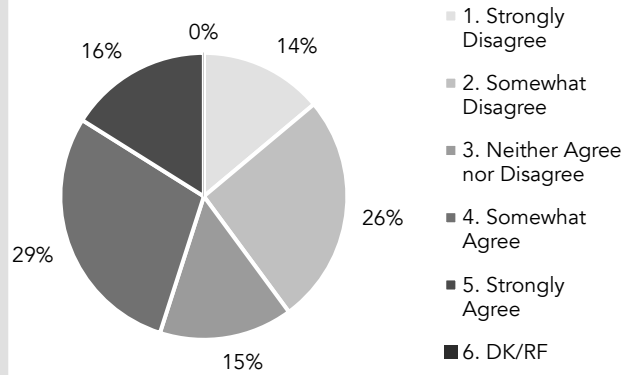
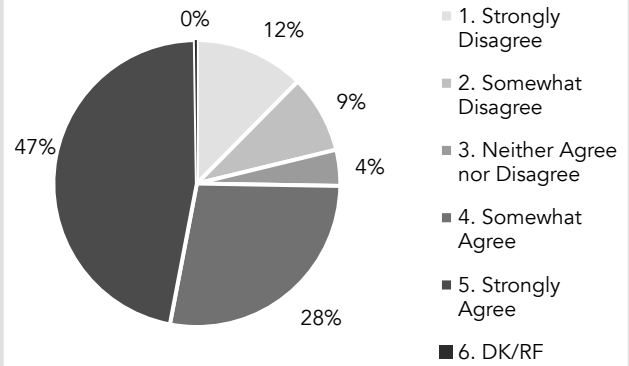


Figure 15. To what extent do you agree that debt is a problem in your community?



4.0 GOVERNANCE DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

4.1 CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

There are high levels of confidence in the capabilities of the security and intelligence services to contain VE.

Ajloun has experienced relatively little unrest and few VE threats compared with Jordan's other governorates. Some respondents recognized this, which may partly account for high levels of confidence in national security services. According to quantitative data, 81 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while only 12 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the JAF lacks the ability to keep Jordan safe (see Figure 16). With that in mind, several respondents also applauded the efforts of Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate (GID) to develop its surveillance systems, including its monitoring of social media,¹³⁰ as well as the adoption of new security technologies.¹³¹ For example, the government is expected to have completed the erection of high-tech security fencing along the Syria and Iraq borders by the end of 2016.¹³² Another example is the GID's development of smartphone Apps, such as the Jordan Knights Android App that enables efficient communication with members of the public wishing to report security concerns. Similarly, one respondent commended the government's border restrictions in order to minimize the activities of drug smugglers.¹³³ This was based on the continuous stream of reports detailing drugs raids and anti-trafficking achievements within Jordan, the latter of which totaled 982 cases in 2015 alone.¹³⁴ Other respondents cited the preemptive raid on an alleged ISIS cell in Irbid in March 2016 as evidence of the security services' ability to keep VE at bay. Such is local pride in the efficacy of Jordan's CVE security services that several respondents boasted of Jordan's superior achievements – with reference to the preemptive March 2016 Irbid raid – compared with those of other countries, including France. Appreciation of Jordan's security services' capabilities is enhanced by the fact that locals perceive Jordan to be a specific target of VEOs.¹³⁵ Consequently, there were expressions of sympathy for security personnel considering the challenges they face. Accordingly, there are high levels of respect for the JAF. As revealed in quantitative findings, 82 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while only 11 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that members of the JAF do not behave in a respectful way (see Figure 17).

¹³⁰ "Social media websites are controlled and watched by the government 24/7." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹³¹ "The level of interior monitoring and the development of security systems and provision of new tools and machines to increase monitoring and safety [is helping to fight VE]." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹³² StrategyPage: The News as History 2016. 'Counter-terrorism: Jordan builds more barriers', StrategyPage: The News as History, March 20, 2016.

¹³³ "We hear about smugglers who were caught trying to enter the Jordanian border. If there were no controls on the border with the surrounding countries, smugglers would have been able to enter and spread insecurity between the public." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹³⁴ The Jordan Times 2016. 'AND agents foil "largest drug smuggling attempt in Jordan", arrest three suspects', The Jordan Times, September 08, 2016.

¹³⁵ "Despite the fact that Jordan is targeted by these groups [VEOs], no one could have entered, which means that we have good inside security." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

"Jordan is ahead of France in fighting terrorism. In Irbid, we managed to find the sleeper cell, while in France an exhibition and a club were bombed."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

Figure 16. To what extent do you agree that the JAF lack the ability to keep Jordan safe?

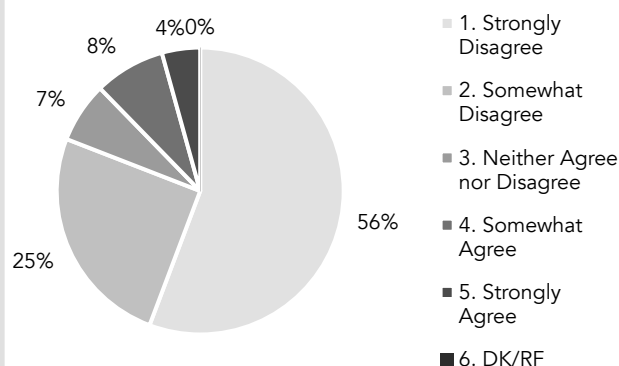
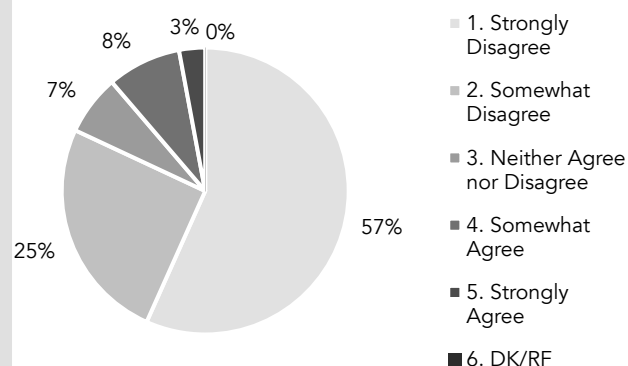


Figure 17. To what extent do you agree that the JAF do not behave in a respectful way?



Locals are unconvinced by the government's ideological, developmental and communications CVE efforts.

Despite high levels of confidence in the government's security initiatives against VE and VEOs, there is a lack of optimism for a state-driven, long-term CVE plan. On the contrary, several respondents expressed concerns about the government's failure to mount a convincing ideological challenge to VE, and several deplored its inability to exploit media communications – chiefly social media – to raise awareness among the population.¹³⁶ Accordingly, these respondents bemoaned the government's failure to employ a more diverse strategy in order to tackle VE, apparently due to its poor grasp of youth culture and unwillingness to better understand it.¹³⁷ For example, one respondent complained about the direction of government influence over the media, which is reportedly serving state interests rather than those of young people. Consequently, there is a lack of confidence among locals in official media platforms, driving many to seek out social media information sources as an alternative.¹³⁸ This is an unfortunate dynamic considering the

¹³⁶ "Security: the government is doing a good job. Ideology: the government is not doing a good job. They should be working more on media channels. Awareness: the government is not doing a good job either." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹³⁷ "Unfortunately, the governmental institutions do not use different tools to face it [VE], and do not know how to deal with the youth. This is because those who are studying the youth are not young." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹³⁸ "What I want to say is that the lack of belief in the media transferring the truth leaves a gap between the people and the government – just like what happened with Kasasbeh. The incident happened in the morning, but the media announced it eight hours later. Where was the government all this time? They left the citizens thirsty for information; they made us look for it on the social media." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

high levels of skepticism in Ajloun surrounding social media news credibility (see section 7.2 The Role of the Media). Meanwhile, in terms of developmental factors, and regardless of any security victories against VE, so long as unemployment and poverty continue to plague local residents, some of the root causes of homegrown VE will remain. Several respondents addressed this point, noting that until the government is able and/or willing to tackle youth unemployment, VE will have a sustained appeal.¹³⁹ In fact, quantitative findings indicated that locals believe the main obstacles to an effective government CVE campaign hinge on state capacity slightly more than state determination. For example, while 48 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, 41 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the central government does not have the power to control VE (see Figure 18). At the same time, a marginally lower 37 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 52 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the central government does not want to control VE (see Figure 19).

Ongoing government-sponsored CVE initiatives also receive criticism from respondents. These include local government-funded institutions that locals claim are out of touch with youth and thereby failing to mount a serious challenge to VE ideologies.¹⁴⁰ One example is the independent government institution, The Higher Council for Youth, which some consider outdated in its activities and discourse.¹⁴¹ In addition to the shortcomings of these initiatives, several respondents lamented their scarcity, claiming that a greater level of youth engagement is necessary in order to counter the allure of VEOs.¹⁴²

"The Jordanian government is not doing anything to fight terrorism. They only track some individuals and arrest them. But they do not do any activities or programs to prevent young people from joining these groups. That's why the government is to blame – for not demolishing extremist ideology and for not focusing on the youth."

(Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

¹³⁹ "The government hasn't done anything. If the government was interested in combating extremism, it should have known that youth go to ISIS because of their bad financial situations. Meaning that the government should start new projects so youth can find jobs." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

¹⁴⁰ "If you go to any youth center funded by the government, you will see the same four or five people every time. These people are employees; they don't believe in anything we're saying. They come to give lectures and this has become their routine. They do not care about ideology." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁴¹ "The government is unable to provide alternatives for the youth. The Higher Council for Youth has had the same speech for 20 years; they have the same lectures, given by the same lecturers." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁴² "If the government had had a bigger role in bringing [together] youth and giving them seminars and workshops in awareness, they wouldn't have joined [VEOs]." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

Figure 18. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not have the power to control VE?

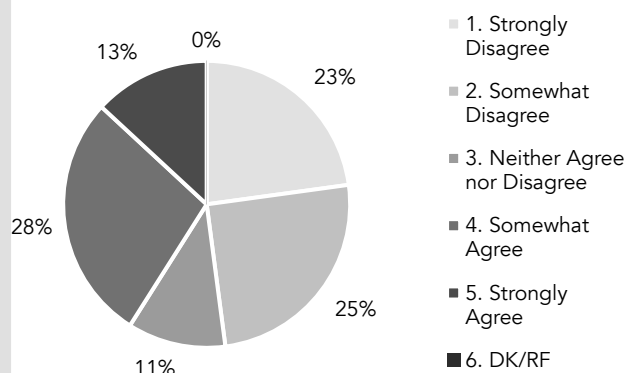
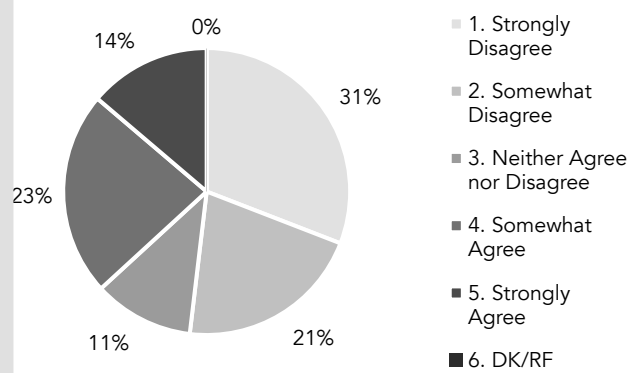


Figure 19. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not want to control VE?



State-appointed imams lack influence due to apparently irrelevant and outdated religious discourse, as well as poor training and personal hypocrisy.

In response to increasing concerns about the rise of religious extremism across the country, the government intensified its grip over state-appointed imams in 2014. For example, it now prescribes sermon topics through the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and has reasserted its intolerance to what it deems extremist discourse.¹⁴³ However, several respondents implied that the scheme is backfiring in Ajloun: far from extinguishing extremist discourse in mosques, it has allowed extremist Islamic figures unaffiliated with the state to command the religious high ground and wield unrivaled influence among the public. For one respondent, the main reason for this is that state-appointed clerics are preaching irrelevant and outdated topics that bear little significance to contemporary issues. These topics instead relate to core Islamic customs such as giving zakat (charity to the needy) and observing Ramadan correctly. Such 'soft topics' reportedly fail to resonate with local youth or provide them with ideological foundations. Consequently, extremists are able to exploit an ideological void unchallenged by moderate alternatives.¹⁴⁴ Another explanation for the failure of the state-sponsored imam scheme is that the imams are inadequately trained and thus lacking expertise. Consequently, they are reportedly incapable of effectively cultivating moderate Islam and fostering awareness about VE among local youth.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, one respondent added that the capabilities of these imams are insufficient to effectively counter-balance

¹⁴³ Booth, William & Taylor Luck 2014. 'To counter rise of Islamic State, Jordan imposes rules on Muslim clerics', The Washington Post, November 09, 2014.

¹⁴⁴ "The Friday speech doesn't focus on important issues such as spreading awareness for the youth. That's why the youth have an ideological void that can be used by these groups [VEOs] and filled with terrorist ideology." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁴⁵ "I blame the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, which is supposed to follow the issues of the mosque and the imams. If they don't want to give workshops to deal with the guys and make them aware, they should put someone in the mosque who delivers awareness and prays with the youth. The Ministry of Awqaf doesn't do it correctly, [or] educate the youth about moderate religion and the truth about the extremist groups." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

VE.¹⁴⁶ A final factor accounting for the failure of state-appointed imams to resonate with the public is that they are apparently behaving hypocritically. As one respondent explained, local government-employed imams are not applying to their personal lives the religious lessons that they preach in the mosque.¹⁴⁷ This inconsistency serves to potentially discredit their religious discourse, their personal reputation, or both. Considering this, it is unsurprising that Ajloun suffers from a distinct shortage of moderate religious role models (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives).

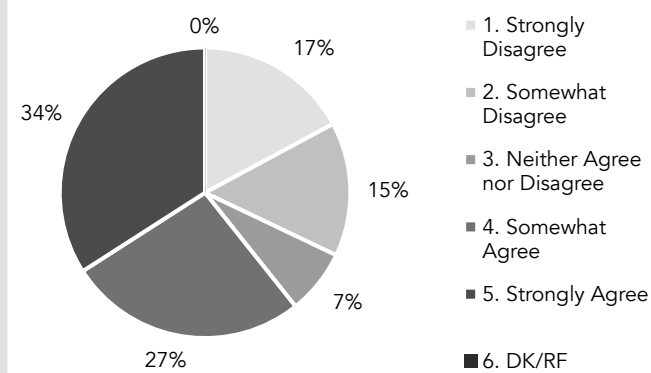
"We are talking about religious groups who work in the dark. There are religious groups that work under the Ministry of Awqaf [and Islamic Affairs]. But the other groups have won because the official groups who have platforms in mosques talk about [issues relating to] kissing your wife in Ramadan [that might] ruin your fast. Lately, the government has limited the Friday speeches, and started handing out speeches that are previously written. Who writes these speeches? If you hear the Friday speech you see that they speak about things that are irrelevant to what we are currently living. This gives space for other groups to reach the youth."

(Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

State corruption is creating disquiet and facilitating the propaganda of Salafist Jihadists and VEOs.

Like other governorates across the country, Ajloun witnessed public demonstrations in 2011 and 2012 calling for action against state corruption.¹⁴⁸ ¹⁴⁹ For the majority of respondents, who understood Jordan to be facing difficult economic challenges, emerging evidence of state corruption is entirely inexcusable. Even for those who, contrary to popular opinion and expert analysis,¹⁵⁰ denied that Jordan faces financial predicaments, this belief has only served to aggravate resentment at perceived state corruption, which is identified as a cause of the country's economic woes. One respondent, for instance, implied that, while the government is receiving

Figure 20. To what extent do you agree that government officials are corrupt?



¹⁴⁶ "The Ministry of Awqaf didn't take the responsibility to change because there's no one who is specialized in this field of discouraging VE." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁴⁷ "They are employees [religious leaders] – their role ends when they convince the people with what they say. I see how people from the Ministry of Awqaf act differently when they are in an official ceremony [compared with] in their personal life. They do not practice what they preach." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁴⁸ Ammon News 2011. 'Ajloun protesters call for improving services', Ammon News, September 18, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Petra News Agency 2012. 'Peaceful demonstrations call for reform', Petra News Agency, June 29, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ The Economist 2016. 'The uneasy crown', The Economist, October 22, 2016.

international financial aid to assist its accommodation of refugees, this money is being mishandled.¹⁵¹ Several other respondents referred to the June 2016 investigations into the corruption case involving the embezzlement of firearms by GID officials.¹⁵² The Central Intelligence Agency and Saudi-sourced weapons, intended for Syrian rebels, were reportedly being sold on the black market for what amounts to millions of dollars.¹⁵³ Respondents' awareness of this case stems from online newspaper articles, including those published by *The New York Times* and *Al Quds Al Arabi*. Such cases are likely to have played into a widely held perception that state corruption persists. For example, 61 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 32 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that government officials are corrupt (see Figure 20).

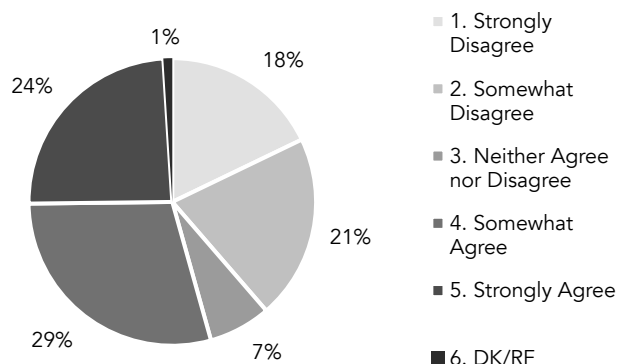
"The Jordanian economy is not weak, but it is corrupt. The money in Jordan is more than enough, but we hear that there are many corrupt people who are draining our resources."

(Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

Political exclusion among youth may be driving them toward VEOs.

Quantitative findings suggested that a large proportion of the local population feels politically marginalized. Indeed, 53 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 39 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that it is useless trying to get the government to listen to them (see Figure 21). Likewise, 53 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 33 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that there is no point in voting, as it doesn't change anything (see Figure 22). These findings corresponded with complaints by respondents that the state is failing to provide political representation for local youth. This is a cause of frustration among residents who feel the state should be encouraging youth political participation as part of an overall strategy to counter the influence of VEOs.¹⁵⁴ In fact, one respondent claimed that the government is actively discouraging political engagement among young people, which is purportedly driving them to

Figure 21. To what extent do you agree that it is useless trying to get the government to listen to you?



¹⁵¹ "Many countries in the world used refugees for development; we only used them to get funds – funds that no one knows where they go." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁵² Mazzetti, Mark & Ali Younes 2016. 'C.I.A arms for Syrian rebels supplied black market, officials say', *The New York Times*, 2016.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ "[The government can prevent youth from joining VEOs by] making them aware of the danger of these groups [VEOs], by educating them and making them participate in the political decision making process." (Male, 34, Journalist, Ajloun)

extreme outlets of expression including violence in Syria. Accordingly, there were calls for the state to provide political opportunities for young people that enable them to assume a sense of responsibility and inclusion inside and outside of their home communities. Respondent propositions in this respect consist of enabling youth to participate in parliamentary elections and giving them positions within various ministries where they can represent their own generation.¹⁵⁵

Considering the political grievances outlined here, it is not altogether surprising that the Royal Court, in addition to the government, is perceived as politically negligent. As the administrative foundation of the country's political policies, the Royal Court must essentially approve of any positive political structural change, and thereby may be held responsible for the lack thereof. Indeed, this was implied in quantitative findings, which indicated that 55 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 35 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the Royal Court does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 23).

"Youth marginalization and exclusion [and] keeping youth away from the political decision making process [has motivated them to fight in Syria]."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Figure 22. To what extent do you agree that you do not feel that there is a point in voting, as it doesn't change anything?

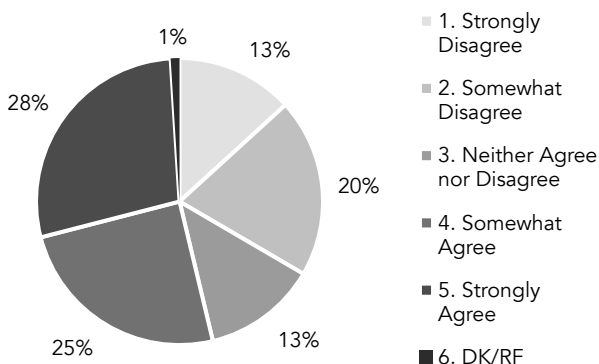
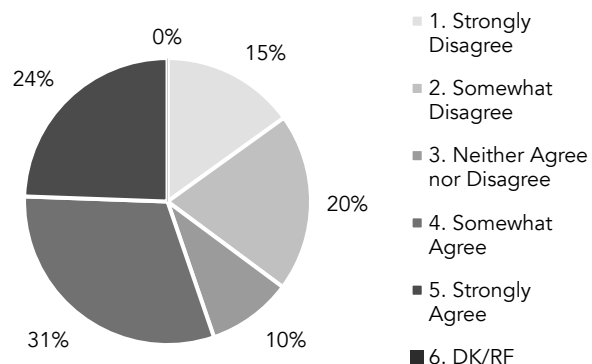


Figure 23. To what extent do you agree that the Royal Court does not care about the needs of the people?



Due to its inadequate provision of job opportunities, many perceive the government to be socio-economically negligent, while VEOs offer potentially attractive alternatives.

There are widespread feelings of socio-economic neglect by the government. For example, in attributing blame for local unemployment and any related VE in Ajloun (see section 3.1 Education and Employment), several respondents were outspoken in charging the government. They urged the regime to take the

¹⁵⁵ "We can lower the age of parliamentary elections so that the youth will be able to get into this experience and represent the youth. Give them a role and [sense of] importance through putting them in some ministries, because they will know better, in some positions, than other ministers who are older." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

demands of protesters seriously and recognize its responsibility to create opportunities. Indeed, the fact that the occupations in which opportunities are notably scarce are also the most popular for young students in Ajloun suggests that these problems will persist unless opportunities are expanded. A widely held perspective that government efforts to do so are wanting was implicit in quantitative findings, which indicated that 57 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 36 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the central government does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 24). This applies equally to local government, which, according quantitative findings, residents believe to be even more neglectful than central government. Indeed, 61 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 31 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that local government does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 25). The disquieting implications of these findings is compounded by the fact that a striking proportion of locals considers VEOs a viable socio-economic support network, rendering them a potentially attractive alternative to the incumbent government (see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt).

"The government has to employ the people. They have to understand that those who demonstrate do it because they have no other choices, because the government has closed the door in their faces. Unemployment is a major cause for all this."

(Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

Figure 24. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not care about the needs of the people?

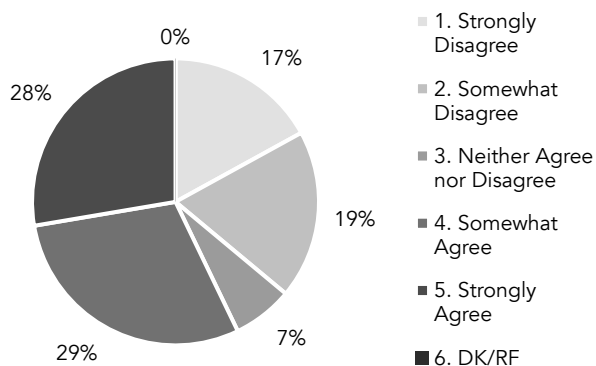
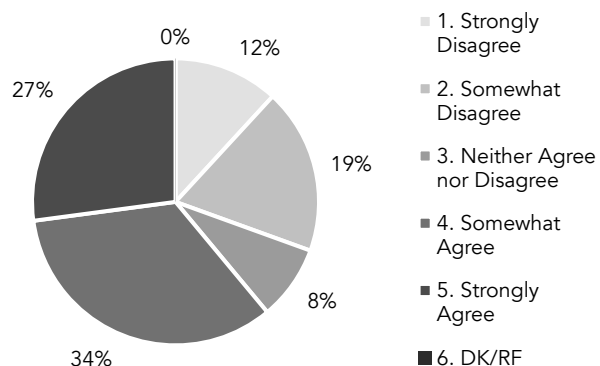


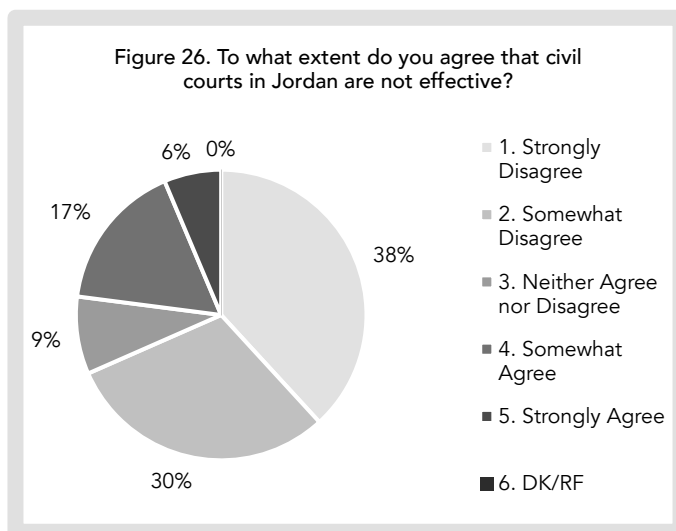
Figure 25. To what extent do you agree that the local government does not care about the needs of the people?



4.2 LAW ENFORCEMENT

Although the majority is satisfied with local courts, there are concerns that a lack of judicial support is driving people toward violence.

Quantitative findings revealed that the majority of locals are content with the functionality of local courts. Indeed, 68 percent of Mafrq GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 23 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that civil courts in Jordan are not effective (see Figure 26). These high satisfaction ratings derive from a wide perception that civil courts conduct fair trials and distribute appropriate sentences. This has served to create a sense of trust between residents and the civil judicial system as represented by Ajloun Court of First Instance, located on the main street of Ajloun district. Here, the chief judge, Mohammad Al Khasawneh, presides over petty criminal cases whereby the sentence is limited to no longer than one week or a 10 JD fine.



Although the majority approves the justice system, 23 percent is not a negligible minority. Furthermore, nine percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that civil courts in Jordan are not effective (see Figure 26). Several respondents provided explanations for this dissatisfaction. For example, one individual claimed that many locals lack confidence in the Ministry of Justice, which they consider to be neglectful. A consequence of this, according to the same respondent, is that some individuals are being driven to violence as they take the law into their own hands. Reportedly, this is frequently the case with regards to inter-tribal conflicts, to which the government apparently turns a blind eye.¹⁵⁶

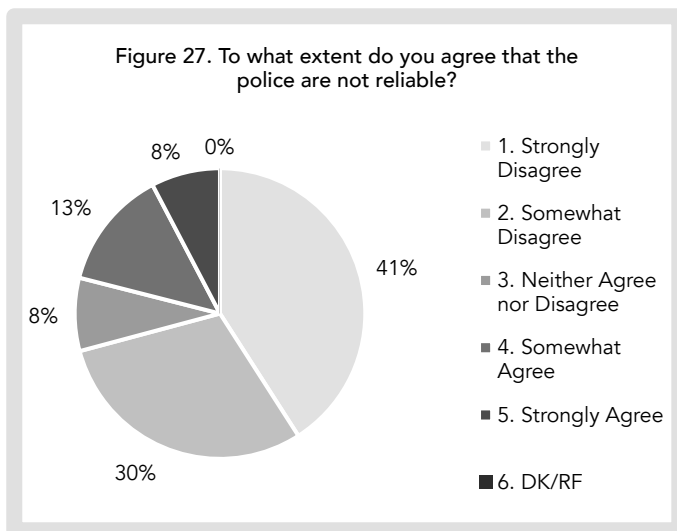
"There is a gap between citizens and the Ministry of Justice; the people do not trust the directorial unit at the Ministry of Justice because it is not able to support these people. That's why they seek refuge in violence."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁵⁶ "There are examples in Ajloun of social violence and problems between clans that the government ignores or does not react to as fast as it should. That's why people take their rights with their own hands." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

A heavy police presence is inspiring confidence in local and national security, although certain areas where even the police feel intimidated are neglected by local security.

Many respondents recognized an increasing security threat across Jordan, especially in areas close to the northern border. For some, this danger extends to Ajloun, where anxieties are fueled by news of violence in neighboring Irbid (see section 7.2 The Role of the Media). That said, these concerns are being assuaged, in part by a conspicuous police presence across the country, including patrols and checkpoints. One respondent also appreciated the fast response time of the local police force,¹⁵⁷ which is based in two stations across the governorate: one on the main road of Ajloun City, and the other in Kufranjah town (Kufranjah district). That the police force has achieved a reputation of competence was also discernible in quantitative findings, which indicated that 71 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 21 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the police are not reliable (see Figure 27). Likewise, among the majority, local police do not appear to have tainted their reputation through misconduct. Indeed, 80 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents disagreed, while 20 percent agreed that they or their family had directly suffered from excessive police authority (see Figure 28). That said, however, there are certain areas of Ajloun that are reportedly neglected by the police. This is notably true of Anjara, where high incidences of violence are deterring even the police, who have been attacked or threatened in the area on several occasions. In 2014, for example, a police car was set on fire in Anjara. Also in Anjara, having arrived in order to break up gang fight, a local policeman was dispossessed of his firearm. He was able to retrieve his weapon only after a fortnight of 'negotiations' with influential gang members.

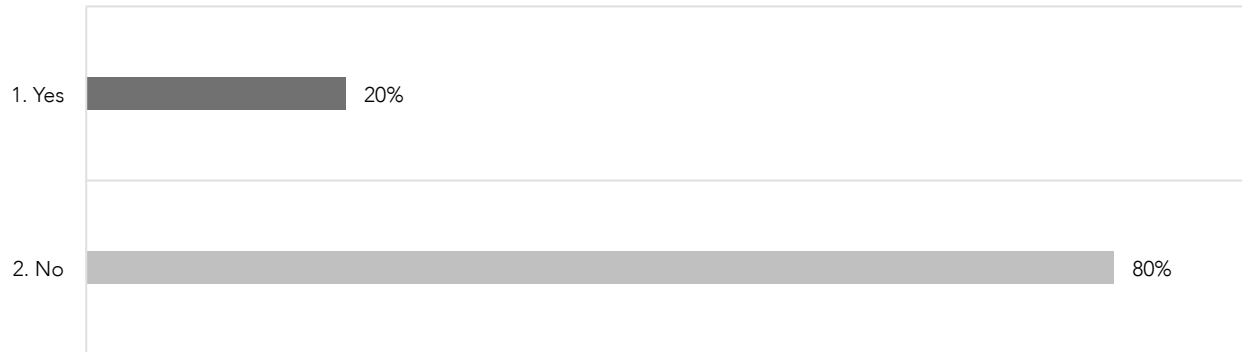


"Ajloun is very close to the borders. We always hear stories about how the police arrested outlaws there. Of course, Jordan can be easily impacted [by VE], but the percentage of security is good. There are police patrols and ID checks always, and this helps keep the security of the country."

(Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

¹⁵⁷ "People in general trust the police and found them working very effectively. When you call 911, they will answer your call immediately and come to your house if you have any problem." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

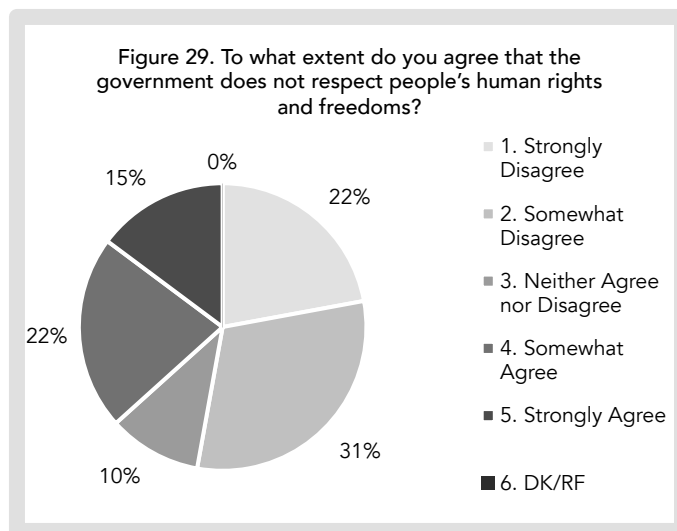
Figure 28. Have you or your family directly suffered from excessive police authority?



4.3 HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Locals appreciate the government's handling of public demonstrations.

The government and its security apparatus have come under much national criticism for their alleged intolerance to public protests. Probably most notoriously, following the 2011 protests in Amman, there was widespread outrage at the alleged brutality of the security forces against demonstrators.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, there have been accusations against the government for having outsourced violent suppression to 'thugs' during demonstrations in Mafraq in 2012.¹⁵⁹ That said, most respondents from Ajloun appeared generally positive about the way in which the government has responded to social unrest, including its response to demonstrations led by political movements. This was indicated in



quantitative findings, which revealed that 53 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 37 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the government does not respect people's human rights and freedoms (see Figure 29). One respondent maintained that by enabling peaceful protests to occur, the government was successfully discouraging people from resorting to alternative illegitimate methods of dissent. The same respondent equated such tolerance with democracy, proudly comparing Jordan with the US and Britain.

Many locals applaud the government's acceptance of opposition parties, despite its recent moves against the MB.

In addition to the government's supposed tolerance of political demonstrations, one respondent applauded its provision of funds for political opposition parties, celebrating this as demonstrative of a country that fosters free speech and civil freedoms.¹⁶⁰ This is despite the stringent conditions that must be met in order for a party to qualify for government funds.¹⁶¹ In fact, the majority of respondents were critical or uncertain with regards to the extent that government tolerates political opposition. As revealed in quantitative findings, 36 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 44 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the government interferes too much in controlling

¹⁵⁸ Al Jazeera 2011. 'Two dead, scores hurt in Jordanian clashes', Al Jazeera, March 25, 2011.

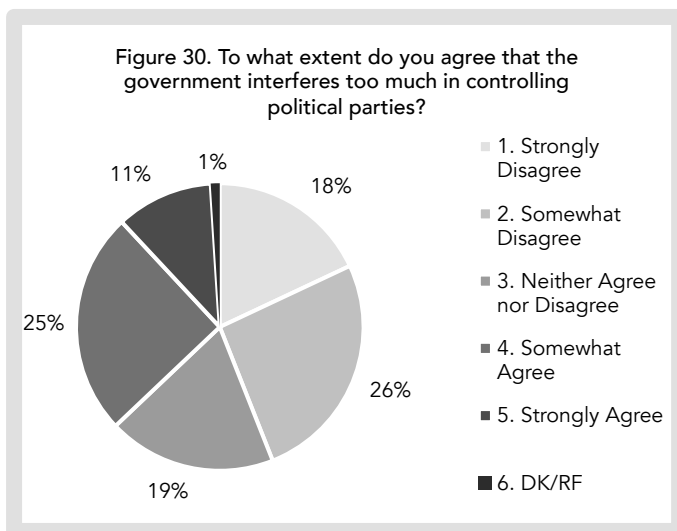
¹⁵⁹ Schenker, David & David Makovsky 2012. 'A full agenda for King Abdullah of Jordan's White House visit', The Washington Institute, January 13, 2012.

¹⁶⁰ "Jordan was the main supporter for people to establish political parties. There is a budget of 50 thousand JDs to each legal party. The government raised the roof of democratic speech and freedom." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁶¹ The Jordan Times 2016. 'Cabinet endorses by-law on funding political parties', The Jordan Times, March 30, 2016.

political parties. Meanwhile, a substantial 19 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that the government interferes too much in controlling political parties (see Figure 30).

One major source of discomfort with relation to this issue may be the government's intervention in the structure and performance of the Jordanian MB. For example, in 2007, there were allegations that the government manipulated the parliamentary election results to disadvantage the MB.¹⁶² Even more damaging, in 2015 the government declared the MB politically illegitimate because its party license was invalid.¹⁶³ This coincided with the government's endorsement of the offshoot organization, the MB Society, provoking criticism that this was a means of pursuing its own political interests.¹⁶⁴ The more recent closure of numerous MB offices across the country further exemplifies the government's intentions to disable the Islamist organization.¹⁶⁵



"Security and intelligence officers allowed people to demonstrate; they allowed all political parties to go out on the streets and express their opinions. They offered them money and safety, and this acceptance will decrease the chances of illegally organized groups."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

The ambiguity and inconsistency of anti-terrorism policy is creating frustrations, and there are criticisms that the government is excessively restrictive of the press.

Respondents leveled criticism at the government for failing to provide a clear understanding of its anti-terrorism laws. Indeed, the government's April 2014 amendments to these laws have drawn much global disapproval for their lack of clarity among other issues.¹⁶⁶ As a likely consequence of this ambiguity, respondents complained that there is a lack of consistency in the application of these laws.¹⁶⁷ In fact,

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ MEE & Agencies 2016. 'More Muslim Brotherhood offices shut down in Jordan', Middle East Eye, April 14, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Alami, Aida 2015. 'Rift deepens within Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood', Al Jazeera, August 17, 2015.

¹⁶⁵ Abu Haniyeh, Hassan 2016. 'Jordan's strategy to fragment the Muslim Brotherhood', Middle East Eye, April 19, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Reporters Without Borders 2014. 'King urged to repeal draconian changes to anti-terrorism law', RWB, June 16, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ "Until now, policies on terrorism are not very clear, and they differ from one minister to another. Jordan must have a clear direct policy on how to deal with this. They have to communicate with the media in order to solve these problems." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

many consider the government to be manipulating them to its own ends, while others evidently lack complete faith in the state's responsible application of the laws. For example, a considerable 24 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 54 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the government uses its anti-terrorism laws as an excuse to control others. Yet, significantly, 22 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 31).

Another route through which some locals consider the government to be abusing its power is press regulations. Shortly after the March 2016 raid on an alleged ISIS cell in Irbid, the government issued a publication ban on the incident.¹⁶⁸ For some, this created a degree of resentment. For example, one respondent complained that the ban constituted government infringement on public press freedoms, adding that such actions also have the negative consequence of redirecting people to less credible media sources. Such views are reflective of a wider objection to government-imposed restrictions on the free press. As recorded in quantitative findings, 51 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 37 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press (see Figure 32).

"The media council banned publishing on the case [March 2016 Irbid raid]. This might cause negative results because, if I was banned by my country to defend it and write my opinion in this case, while the whole world is saying and posting all they want [...] if I cannot write about the incident in newspapers or websites, then I will look for information from other sources, which might not be accurate."

(Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

Figure 31. To what extent do you agree that the government uses its anti-terrorism laws as an excuse to control others?

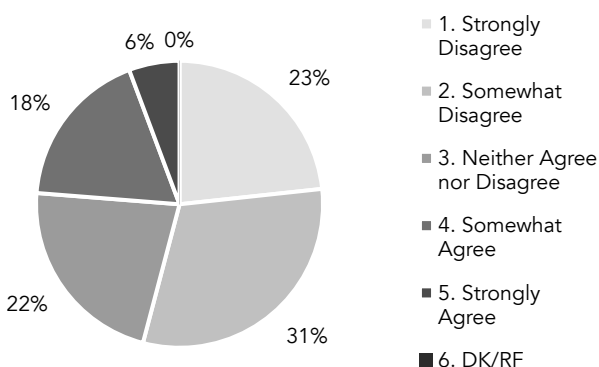
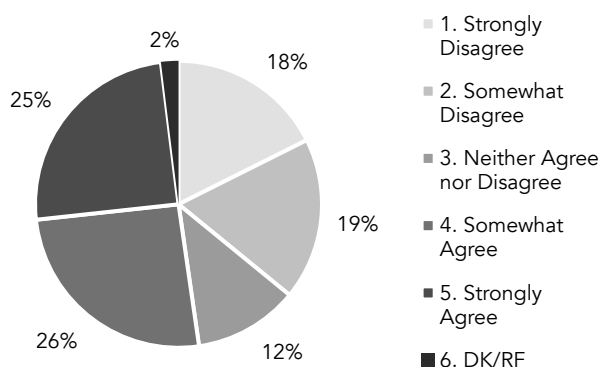


Figure 32. To what extent do you agree that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press?



¹⁶⁸ The Jordan Times 2016. 'Gag order bans coverage of Irbid terror cell news', The Jordan Times, March 06, 2016.

5.0 PSYCHOSOCIAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

5.1 LOCUS OF CONTROL

Families are deemed to be failing in their presumptive responsibility to counter the influence of VEOs, while youth are vulnerable to the influence of radicalized friends.

A number of respondents asserted that the family environment is crucial for imparting knowledge and religious awareness onto local youth. In particular, several respondents emphasized the responsibility of parents to teach their children the values of moderate Islam and encourage an appreciation of other religions, while cultivating an awareness of the dangers posed by extremist groups. Thus, some individuals bemoaned the failure of local adults to achieve this, whether as a result of neglect, disinclination or ignorance. This was particularly with reference to their sons, who are reportedly falling into dangerous habits as a consequence of negligent parenting.¹⁶⁹ One respondent for instance, claimed that the family of a local man who fled to Syria as a VEO recruit failed even to recognize signs of radicalization in their son, thereby rendering them powerless to intervene.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, some parents in Ajloun are imparting violent tendencies on their children. This is reportedly driving the latter into undesirable company.¹⁷¹ With these observations in mind, there were appeals for parents to be provided with awareness training.¹⁷² Furthermore, one respondent expressed a willingness to collaborate closely with security services in monitoring local behavior, even against his own children, if necessary.¹⁷³

"Families should be more responsible with delivering moderate Islamic intellect to their children and youth in general. They should increase awareness toward these groups [VEOs] and movements as well as learn more about Islam and other religions, while teaching their children how to accept one another."

(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

Youth have a unique ability to influence their peers to either adopt more extreme beliefs or spurn radical groups.

Both ideologically and materially, those who have been seduced by VEOs are disposed to attempts at radicalizing their peers. For example, ISIS is known to offer its recruits bonus payments if they are able to

¹⁶⁹ "The families should show interest in their sons. The problem is the lack of awareness and [upbringing]. For example, sons staying out late along with the presence of drugs has caused many sons to become drug addicts." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁷⁰ "If his family advised him, he wouldn't have left them and moved to Syria. His family didn't warn him; they didn't even notice the change in his personality." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹⁷¹ "A while ago, my uncle was treating his children in a very strict and violent way, and my father noticed that this caused his children to start walking with bad people." (Male, 30 IT Technician, Ajloun)

¹⁷² "We need to establish projects in order to increase the awareness of the parents." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹⁷³ "If my son, God forbid, would want to join ISIS, I would do everything I could to stop him. If he did not respond, I would report him. I don't mind losing him because he would kill many innocent people." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

bring along their friends (see section 3.1 Education and Employment). Furthermore, respondents explained that such is the extent of ideological indoctrination among VEO sympathizers that they often attempt to pressurize their companions into adopting 'true Islam', often with apparent success.¹⁷⁴ For instance, one local who had been convinced by ISIS' claims to religious righteousness and subsequently joined the organization in Syria, launched accusations at his friends of infidelity for refusing to adopt the VEO's particular brand of Islam. On the other hand, there are indications that friends have the capacity to effectively counter the attraction of VEOs. For example, one local youth was on the verge of joining a VEO after being offered financial benefits before a relative caught wind of his intentions and convinced him otherwise.¹⁷⁵

"He was accusing us of infidelity and that we are not interested in the real Islam. He thought that he was inviting us to the right Islam. He was not aware that he was not going to return if he left. ISIS brainwashed him in order to move him there – the thought that they were following the right Islam."

(Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Ajloun's relatively small, insulated population with strong tribal influences constitutes a barrier to VE.

Concerns of an imminent VE threat in Ajloun are relatively low. Indeed, as quantitative findings revealed, only a small minority or locals have themselves felt impacted by VE: 11 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents agreed, while an overwhelming 89 percent disagreed that they or their family had directly suffered from VE (see Figure 33). For some respondents, this is because the governorate is sparsely populated and socially cohesive,¹⁷⁶ closely bound by tribal commitments. And although local tribes may not be directly countering VE, a number of respondents recognized their potential to safeguard youth against VE influences.¹⁷⁷ For example, such is the stature of tribal leaders in Ajloun that they have exceptional persuasive powers and societal influence among their members.¹⁷⁸ One such individual is Sheikh Jihad Al Zghoul of the Al Zghoul tribe based in Anjara. He has been active in encouraging youth to participate in education and development courses such as those coordinated by the Change Medium Center for Development (CMCD) and the All Jordan Youth Committee (AJYC). Similarly, tribes are politically influential: anybody who wishes to run as an election candidate must first secure the approval of his or her

¹⁷⁴ "We always hear stories about a person who became an extremist because of a bad friend." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹⁷⁵ "In the past, this friend was unemployed. One of the groups [VEOs] reached out to him and offered him money for joining. One of his cousins accidentally knew about his intentions so he indirectly talked to him about these groups and how they are against us and Islam and how these groups are full of killing and torturing etcetera. After this conversation with his cousin, my friend changed his mind and decided not to leave." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

¹⁷⁶ "Ajloun is an area that is very socially connected." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

¹⁷⁷ "I believe that tribalism is distancing youth from extremism." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁷⁸ "If a tribal leader heard that someone from his tribe wants to join Daesh, he can stop him and make [all of his] relatives try and convince him to change his ideas and not join the extremists. The tribal leaders here have respect and their word is heeded." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

tribe. However, it is notable that, at least in some areas of the governorate, tribal influence appears to have undergone a dramatic decline over time.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, certain elements of the population are barely touched by tribal influences at all. Most notable in this respect is Ajloun's small West Bank community, concentrated mainly in Anjara (Ajloun district) and Kufranjah district. Indeed, this was reflected in quantitative findings, which revealed a considerable minority to harbor feelings of social estrangement (see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt).

There are claims that the governorate's relative lack of ethnic diversity also reduces the risk of VE at the local level. In addition, one respondent suggested that Ajloun's historically insulated society has reduced the capacity for violent extremists and their ideologies to infiltrate the governorate.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, another respondent emphasized the role of Ajloun's well-connected population in preventing the circulation of VE.¹⁸¹ However, a relative sense of local security does not preclude awareness that VE threats may exist elsewhere across Jordan.¹⁸² Neither does it serve to alleviate any fears relating to VEOs active in the country. Indeed, ISIS' prolific messaging pertaining to the forceful imposition of Islam, as well as extensive exposure of the group's atrocities toward civilians, has created anxieties among locals.¹⁸³

Figure 33. Have you or your family directly suffered from VE?



¹⁷⁹ "Loyalty to a clan does not have an effect. Maybe it did a long time ago. But right now clans have become larger and people have moved away from them. The role of the clan leader has become less effective than before." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

¹⁸⁰ "In Ajloun, we have a conservative community, unclosed now although it was quite closeted for some time. There is no place for Daesh or any extremist in Ajloun; even the Salafist Jihadists have no presence here." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

¹⁸¹ "In Ajloun, everyone knows each other." (Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

¹⁸² "ISIS does not have an apparent effect in Jordan, but there are some sleeper cells, especially in largely populated areas where there is a mix in backgrounds and nationalities. These cells are more present in the capital Amman, and in Zarqa', than other cities." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁸³ "The punishment that they inflict upon people. This frightened our society and made them fear ISIS. They come saying that they will spread the word of Islam, and that they will do it by force – this spreads fear in the hearts of Jordanians. They are afraid of ISIS and they are scared that it might reach Jordan." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

5.2 RELIGIOUS VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Although Christian communities are generally accepted, there are indications of inter-religious tension in Ajloun.

The coexistence of Christians and Muslims in Ajloun is widely accepted across the governorate. Indeed, several respondents expressed pride in their peaceful relations with local Christians, who make up approximately five percent of the population,¹⁸⁴ citing it as an important means of preventing VE. This is despite evidence of significant tension between Christians and Muslims in the recent past. For example, in May 2014, a local Christian man from the Bader family murdered his own daughter in the village of Wahdanah (Ajloun district) after she converted to Islam. This sparked a strong reaction from local Muslim residents, who reportedly attempted to storm and burn down Ajloun Church in retaliation before being thwarted by security forces.¹⁸⁵ Dating further back, in 2000, an individual named Houd Al Samadi murdered two Christians, who were known to have torn up the Qur'an and cursed Muslim civilians. Such incidents may help to explain why a significant minority of locals is religiously intolerant.¹⁸⁶ This is evident in quantitative findings, which indicate that 37 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 54 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose (see Figure 34). Likewise, many locals disapprove of inter-religious integration. For example, 31 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 62 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims (see Figure 35). However, as revealed in these findings, the majority is content to intermingle with their Christian neighbors. In fact, there have even been public initiatives in Ajloun to reinforce the bond between Christians and Muslims. The reverend Nabil Haddad, for example, has contributed to such efforts at community gatherings,¹⁸⁷ as has the International Republican Institute.¹⁸⁸

"In general, the community in Ajloun is religious, and there is harmony between Muslims and Christians"

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁸⁴ Ansamed 2014. 'Jordan: men attack church over killing converted girl', Ansamed, May 05, 2014.

¹⁸⁵ Shah, Zia H 2014. 'Jordanian Christian kills daughter for converting to Islam', The Muslim Times, May 12, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ "We have many individuals with an intolerant religious ideology." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁸⁷ "The reverend Nabil Haddad talked about the tolerance of religion that exists between Muslims and Christians inside Jordan, and the acceptance of religions and the acceptance of others." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

¹⁸⁸ "The Republican Institute held a meeting with the local communities to talk about interfaith between Muslims and Christians." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

Figure 34. To what extent do you think that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose?

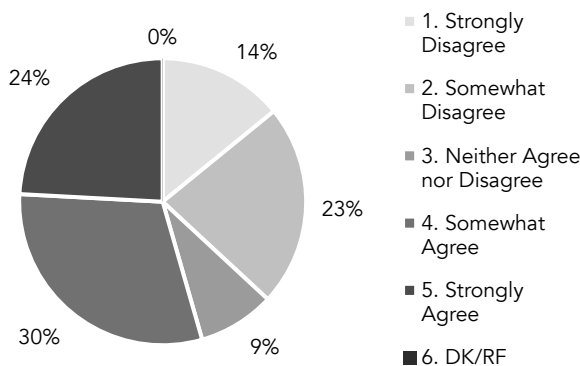
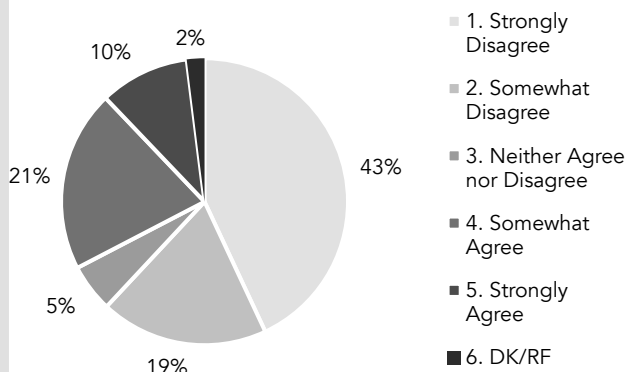


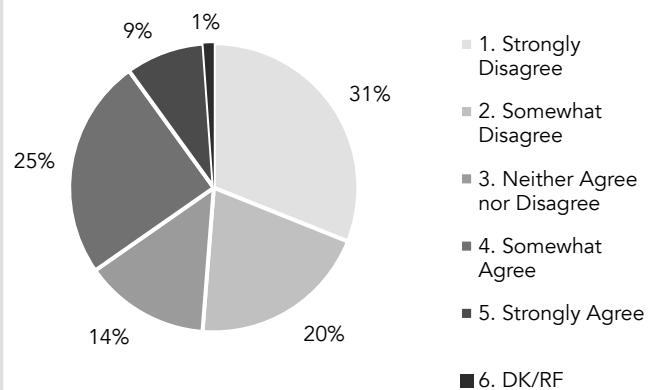
Figure 35. To what extent do you think that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims?



Anti-Shia attitudes are prevalent alongside fears that an invigorated Shia population will fuel local VE.

Several respondents expressed concerns about a significant presence of Shia Muslims in Jordan, some of whom are thought to be of Syrian origin. With a lack of evidence to suggest that many Syrian Shias are entering the country, this appeared to be based primarily on rumors of Shia sleeper cells within the country – notably in northern Karak.¹⁸⁹ These rumors are most likely born out of the fact that it is northern Karak where the mausoleum of Jafar Bin Abi Talib – a site of regional Shia pilgrimage – is located.¹⁹⁰ Other concerns were related to an ostensible resurgence in the country from long-established pockets of Shia Muslims,¹⁹¹ with one respondent making reference to alleged

Figure 36. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable?



¹⁸⁹ "There are also Syrian Shia coming from Syria but they are still hiding, and in case anything happens they will become active. Most of them are in the north of Karak." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁹⁰ Sindawi, Khalid 2010. 'Jordan's encounter with Shiism', Hudson Institute, August 17, 2010.

¹⁹¹ "Recently, we started noticing the presence of the Shia sect in Jordan." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

demands for the construction of Shia mosques potentially supported by Iranian funds.¹⁹² Regardless of their credibility, such rumors are fueling concerns among some locals that the sectarian conflict afflicting the region might also ignite in Jordan.¹⁹³ This is not based exclusively on perceptions of an inherent danger posed by Shia Muslims. Rather, locals were candid in recognizing that Jordan's, and indeed Ajloun's, Sunni population is hostile toward Shia Muslims and may itself be culpable in creating a future sectarian conflict. Such sectarian hostility was apparent in quantitative findings. For example, although 51 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, a considerable 34 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable (see Figure 36). Somewhat contradicting this finding, however, an overwhelming 85 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while only 10 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Islam does not allow the killing of other people (see Figure 37).

Another concern among locals is that the influence of prominent Sunni sheikhs is stirring up sectarian hatred.¹⁹⁴ The tensions that already exist have been fueled in large part by events in Iraq, where Shia militias have, on several occasions, been accused of exerting unprovoked violence on Sunni civilians,¹⁹⁵ notably in Fallujah.¹⁹⁶ Despite these tensions, however, there is little evidence to suggest that many locals are willing to commit to the extreme sectarian practices advocated by groups such as ISIS. For example, only 16 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 75 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the practice of takfir is justifiable (see Figure 38).

"The reason is the disagreements between Sunni and Shia sects. The Shia sect is not accepted by [the] Sunni sect in Jordan. The disagreement might result in many problems. Sooner or later, there will be a clash between both sects."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁹² "Shia sect people were here in Jordan before, but they were never on the surface. After the Shia expansion had reached Jordan, the Shia sect people started demanding to build mosques for Shias. Shias might have gotten economic support from Iran." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁹³ "There is a chance that this number of Syrian Shias will increase and spread, which might increase extremism in our country. It affected the Sunnis and created a feeling of rage toward Shias." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁹⁴ "We can also blame the sheikhs [for local VE] because some of them give hate speeches and provoke people against each other, which might lead to conflicts. We all know that the majority in Jordan is Sunni, but there are some Shia. So if anyone provokes Sunni [against] Shia [populations] this might lead to sectarian conflicts." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

¹⁹⁵ "The country that should be blamed the most [for local VE] is Iraq because of the killing of Sunni sect people at the hands of Shia sect people." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

¹⁹⁶ Macdonald, Alex 2016. "'300 civilians executed' by Iraqi militias during Fallujah fighting", Middle East Eye, June 07, 2016.

Figure 37. To what extent do you think that Islam does not allow the killing of other people?

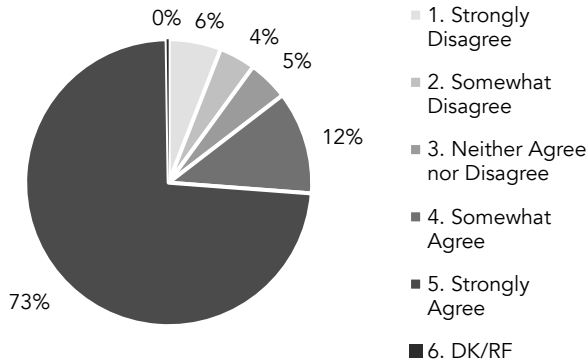
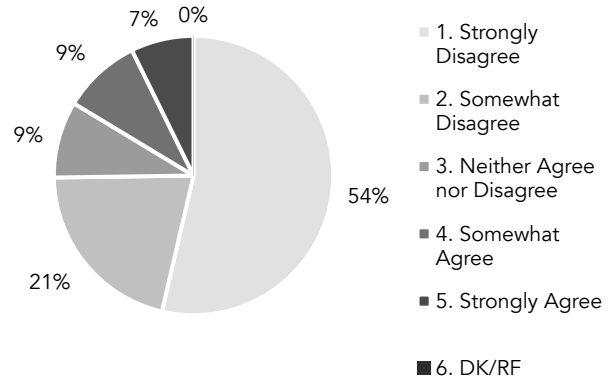


Figure 38. To what extent do you agree that the practice of takfir is justifiable?

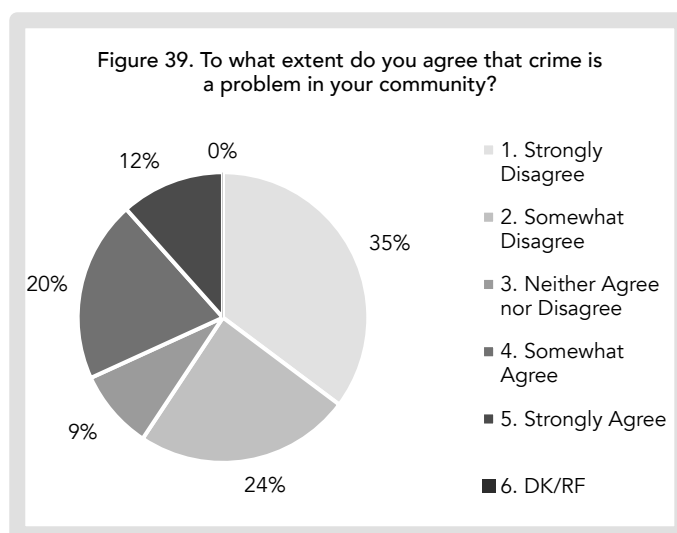


5.3 EXPOSURE TO CRIME AND CONFLICT

VEO recruits are associated with unlawfulness, while violent crime and theft are on the rise in certain areas as socio-economic pressures mount.

Ajloun has witnessed a distinct increase in street crime over recent years, which most respondents related to unprecedented socio-economic strains stemming from the influx of Syrian refugees into the governorate. Several respondents, for example, observed an increase in theft as a consequence of deepening poverty at the local level.¹⁹⁷ One respondent, in reference to the impact of Syrian refugees, recalled an incident whereby a group of criminals stole a relative's automobile at gun or knifepoint.¹⁹⁸ This occurred while the victim was travelling through unlighted backstreets at night en route to Amman from Sakhrāh district. Another respondent reported a spike in local homicide, recalling the discovery of a dead

body on the roadside by Al Qal'aa street in central Ajloun and describing an increase in the circulation of murder stories.¹⁹⁹ However, the majority of locals have not fallen victim to crime themselves. As revealed in quantitative findings, only 13 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents agreed, while 87 percent disagreed that they or their family had suffered directly from crime (see Figure 40). Respondents identified Anjara as the area most prone to violent crime within Ajloun, where fights frequently break out, sometimes involving firearms. In addition to gun crime, drug use is a problem associated with Anjara (Ajloun district), as well as Kufranjah district (see below).²⁰⁰ It is most likely these areas that account for the considerable minority view that criminal activity is problematic in their locality. As recorded in quantitative findings, 32 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 59 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that crime is a problem in their community (see Figure 39). According to some observers, it is not coincidental that Anjara and Kufranjah are also two of the areas within Ajloun most



¹⁹⁷ "Thefts are on the rise because of poverty." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

¹⁹⁸ "He came from the street at 2am, and people got out from behind a tree and raised a weapon, and they took his car." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

¹⁹⁹ "A while ago, we were surprised to find a dead body left on the side of the road. No one knows who killed him or how and why he was killed. We hear many stories about dead bodies found in a plastic bags or hanged on a tree, with no clues leading to the killer." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

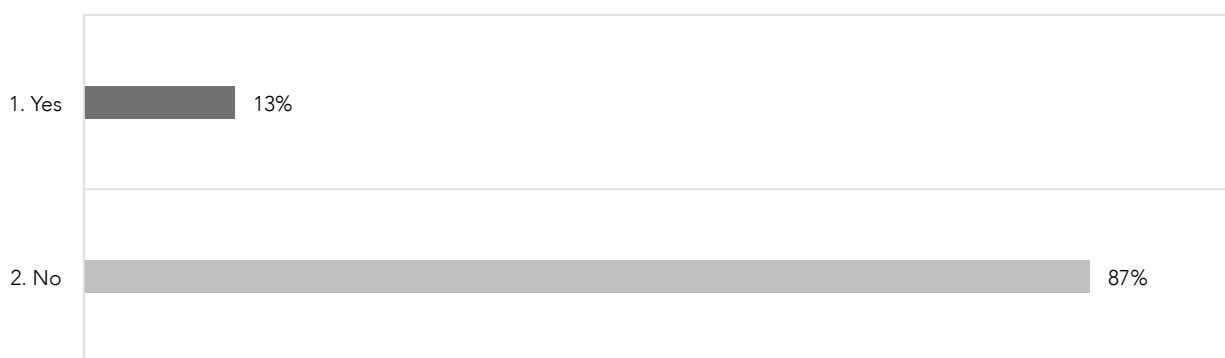
²⁰⁰ "In Kufranjah near the Ghor, and in Anjara on the way to Jerash, you notice that you might find outlaws more than anywhere else because they are highly populated and because there are many drug smugglers." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

closely associated with VEOs. Indeed, although not exploring the relationship, one respondent implied a close link between criminality and VEO membership.²⁰¹

"Anjara, Anjara, we have to cry for Anjara. I cry for Anjara. It needs a whole squad to solve its problems. They have polygamy and a high percentage of divorce. They have fights every day. I was in the police station the other day and a man told me that another man pulled out a gun on him."

(Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

Figure 40. Have you or your family directly suffered from crime?



Certain areas are particularly associated with weapons and drugs, which provide multiple routes to VE.

There are reportedly large numbers of young people participating in drugs circles across Ajloun.²⁰² This was implicit in quantitative findings, which indicated that 50 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 43 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that drug abuse is a problem in their community (see Figure 41). Certain areas of the governorate are notorious for their high levels of drug abuse, most notably Anjara town – especially the Al Ishara area – and Kufranjah district. As noted above, respondents indicated that it is not coincidental that these areas are also among Ajloun's VE hotspots. Indeed, Anjara is known to have accommodated a group of drug users who were also followers of a local ISIS advocate (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs). Since the latter has been jailed numerous times, however, his followers have distanced themselves from him. Also indicating a close connection between drug abuse and VEOs is the experience of one young drug user from Anjara who attempted (but failed) to reach Syria after being offered money to join ISIS. Aside from these close links between drugs and VE, one respondent described an indirect connection between the two. In Ayn Al Bustan

²⁰¹ "The more the people are abiding by the law, the less they tend to join these violent groups." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²⁰² "Many youths work in selling and using drugs which has a bad effect on the families." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

(Kufranjah district), a local man is blamed for having brought about the fragmentation of his family after engaging in the drugs trade. Reportedly, the psychological impact of this turn of events drove the man toward VE, as he began developing sympathies for ISIS.

As well as being notorious for drugs circulation, Anjara is also renowned for its prevalence of weapons. As with drugs, this applies in particular to the Al Ishara area of Anjara, where local men are known to carry pocketknives. Here, the availability of weapons is closely related to the drugs trade, with drugs dealers often carrying firearms. According to locals, these criminals usually operate at nighttime, when they often cordon off the street with their cars in order to conceal their activities. As with the prevalence of drug abuse, quantitative findings suggested that, although concentrated within certain areas, weapons are considered a significant problem across the governorate. For example, 41 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 53 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the availability of weapons is a problem in their community (see Figure 42).

"A family member started to work in dealing drugs. His actions caused his family's disintegration. He started thinking of joining ISIS."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Figure 41. To what extent do you agree that drug abuse is a problem in your community?

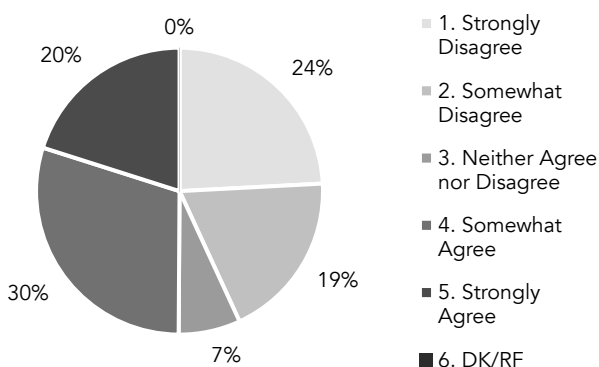
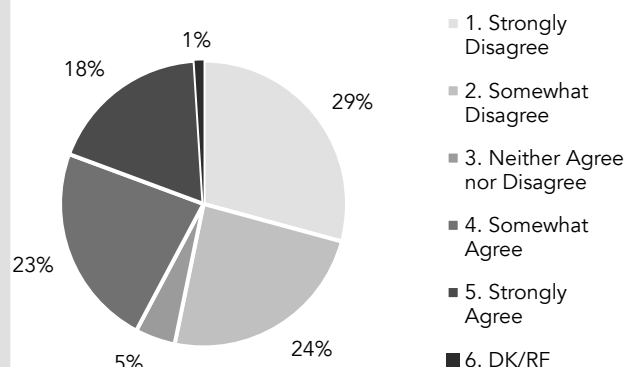


Figure 42. To what extent do you agree that the availability of weapons is a problem in your community?



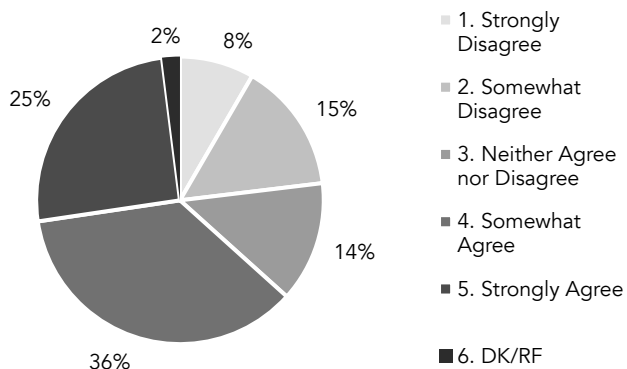
Tribal disputes occasionally escalate into violent conflict.

Related to concerns among a significant minority that the formal justice system is not entirely effective in dealing with inter-tribal disputes (see section 4.2 Law Enforcement), respondents explained that it is not uncommon for tribes to take matters into their own hands. This occasionally results in violent conflict between tribes, as was the case when a dispute between the Momani tribe (based in Ibbin, Sakhras district) and the Samadi tribe (based in Anjara, Ajloun district) led to the assassination of Ashraf Al Momani in August 2009. Indeed, the Samadi tribe appears to have a particular propensity toward violence. A second example, for instance, also involving the Momani tribe, occurred in October 2012,

when violent conflict between the two tribes sprang from a dispute about child custody between a divorced couple.

A third example was the May 2013 altercation between the Zghoul tribe and the Al Samadi tribe in Anjara. This resulted in several deaths as combatants resorted to using knives. A final example also concerns these two tribes: in January 2016, personal disputes between tribal members led to intense violence in Anjara, where perpetrators vandalized public property, houses, cars, and shops, as well as resorting to the use of firearms. Some of these tribal disputes may stem from tribal inequality in Ajloun. Indeed, 61 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 23 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that inequality between tribes is a problem in their community. Meanwhile, a noteworthy 14 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that inequality between tribes is a problem in their community (see Figure 43). Tribal tensions have also been fueled by particular incidents in the past. For example, following the rape of a young boy by a member of the Momani tribe in the 1980s, a popular rumor has developed that describes Momani tribal members as homosexuals.²⁰³

Figure 43. To what extent do you agree that inequality between tribes is a problem in your community?



"They [the Samadi tribe and the Zghoul tribe] fought against each other by sabotaging and breaking stores and cars, burning houses and assaulting public properties, as well as beating tribal members and shooting each other or other innocent people."

(Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

²⁰³ "It has become a well-known story. If any one hears that you are from the Momani [tribe] they will directly ask you, as a joke, if you love men." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

5.4 EXPOSURE TO VE AND PERCEPTIONS OF VEO THREAT

Disadvantaged suburban areas with high population density and crime rates are more prone to VE.

According to some respondents, the most at-risk areas of the governorate in terms of VE are suburban towns and villages with a high population density. Most notable among these locations are Anjara (Ajloun district) and Kufranjah district, which are known to accommodate large numbers of VEO sympathizers. For example, Anjara is home to one notorious individual who publicly campaigns for ISIS with a degree of success (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs).²⁰⁴ Indeed, Anjara, as well as Kufranjah, is renowned for its large Islamist – violent and non-violent – community, including the MB, Salafists and ISIS sympathizers. This was implicit in the events of 2011, when three busloads of locals from Anjara were transported to Zarqa in order to participate in the violent demonstrations, during which Salafists called for the release of Islamist prisoners, including Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi.²⁰⁵ These suburban VE hotspots are also socio-economically disadvantaged compared with city centers. This is reportedly creating grievances among youth who sense a degree of inequality within the governorate and across the country, which may heighten their receptivity to VEOs that offer a channel for their resentment. Respondent observations that Anjara and Kufranjah, along with Ibbin, have produced most of Ajloun's VEO recruits supports this notion. Anjara, for example, has produced the largest number of Jordanian, as opposed to Syrian, VEO recruits in the governorate.

"In contrast [to suburban and rural-based individuals], youth in cities have a lot of job opportunities. This creates a kind of hatred that leads them [sub-city youth] to extremism."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

Locals associate an increase in VE with the arrival of Syrian refugees.

According to government-released figures, Ajloun's Iraqi refugee population is paltry. However, the governorate has absorbed substantial numbers of Syrian refugees – approximately 14,500 since late-2011 and early-2012.²⁰⁶ It is predominantly among these refugees that many respondents identified the source of Ajloun's VE threat. Reportedly, it was only after their arrival that extreme ideologies consistent with groups such as ISIS apparently began to permeate society. Indeed, one respondent likened the spread of Islamic extremism to a contagious disease, suggesting that a large number of locals have been afflicted.²⁰⁷ This was a common perception, with claims that Syrian refugees have been responsible for

²⁰⁴ "We have a person in Anjara who stands on a traffic light and says, 'it will remain and it will expand', which is one of ISIS' slogans. Most of the people ask him about the meaning and he explains it to them. He achieved his goal." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²⁰⁵ BBC News 2011. 'Jordan unrest: Salafist clash wounds dozens in Zarqa', BBC News, April 15, 2011.

²⁰⁶ Jordan Department of Statistics 2015. 'Jordan's refugee population by province, 2015', Jordan's Department of Statistics, October 12, 2016.

²⁰⁷ "The desperately vulnerable groups, whether from Syria or Iraq, stormed Jordan with their ideologies. It was like an epidemic and it infected the civil society. The groups were drenched with extremism, which was easily transferred to young people, possibly face-to-face, through social encounters or celebrations." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

introducing VE ideologies into local society.²⁰⁸ Additionally, there are reportedly active rumors that certain Syrian refugees have entered Jordan specifically in order to recruit for ISIS. A number of incidents are likely to have fueled the association between Syrian refugees and VE. These include several forced deportations of Syrians for purportedly exhibiting inappropriate attitudes and behavior.²⁰⁹ In one case, a Syrian man living in Kufranjah was deported back to Syria in April 2016 after being accused of recruiting fighters for JN or the FSA. This followed the police force's discovery of six mobile phones with Syrian SIM cards in his possession. Another incident potentially substantiating the connection between Syrian refugees and VE is the alleged discovery of an ISIS cell in 2014. Some members of the cell were reportedly residing in Orjan district, as well as Kufranjah district and Anjara (Ajloun district) – areas renowned for accommodating large numbers of Syrian refugees.²¹⁰ The area that has probably absorbed the largest number of Syrian refugees in Ajloun is Ibbin, where their number is reportedly similar to that of the host population. Respondents claimed that there are many ISIS and JN supporters among these refugees, several of whom have reportedly made attempts to return to Syria as VEO recruits. They are also reported to advocate for JN and ISIS in local neighborhoods. Aside from VEO support, the reputation of Ibbin's Syrian refugees has been damaged by local criminal activity. In one incident, for example, a Syrian refugee raped a 12-year-old girl in the area. To avoid any shame brought about by publicizing the incident, the family of the girl requested that the case not be taken to court, and for the man to be deported instead of detained. In light of such events, many locals are highly suspicious of their Syrian neighbors, who have come to acquire a highly disreputable status. One respondent, for instance, implored the government to closely monitor Syrian refugees and punish them when necessary.²¹¹

"Large numbers of pro-Daesh [refugees] blended with the Jordanian society and its segments. This resulted in growing numbers of people who adopted Islamic extremism."

(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

ISIS' expansionary ambitions are creating concerns that the organization's violence will engulf Jordan.

Observing the conflict in neighboring Syria and Iraq, respondents identified ISIS as the entity posing the most immediate threat to Jordan. Indeed, 72 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 24 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that ISIS is a threat to Jordan (see Figure 44). ISIS' prolific propaganda output, as well as its ample media exposure, has likely contributed to this perception (see section 7.2 The Role of the Media). For example, one of the organization's main slogans,

²⁰⁸ "The presence of Syrians in Jordan has an ideological effect on Jordanians since some of them have an ISIS ideology." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

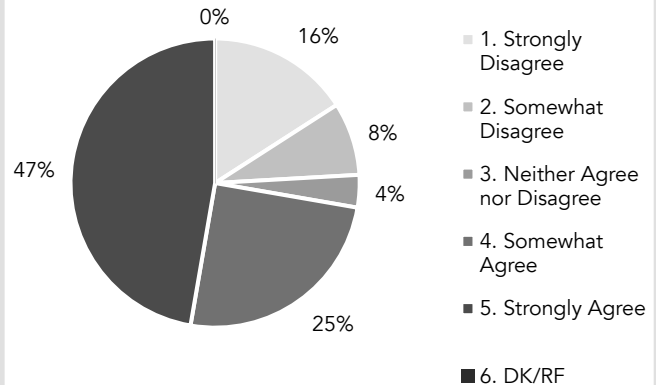
²⁰⁹ "They were in Ajloun, but were transported back to Syria because of their behavior and attitude toward Jordan and its people." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²¹⁰ "Two years ago, an ISIS affiliated cell was caught by the Jordanian security government agency. The cell members were distributed in many Jordanian cities such as Zarqa, Ajloun and Irbid. 17 members of the cell were caught by the government." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²¹¹ "Syrians have weak morals. I pray for God to save the country. And I ask the government to have surveillance over these refugees, and charge them if they do anything wrong. They should recruit these refugees for their own good and put cameras on all the tents." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

"Remaining and Expanding," has been reiterated by TV news channels and has penetrated community discourse (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs). Furthermore, coverage of several recent terrorism scares or attacks in Jordan will have compounded anxieties about the organization's local presence. This includes the March 2016 Irbid raid on an alleged ISIS cell, the June 2016 Ruqban suicide attack, and the June 2016 Baqa'a Camp attack. According to one respondent, should ISIS strengthen its position in Syria and Iraq, it would probably seek to infiltrate Jordan and intensify its violent campaign in the kingdom.

Figure 44. To what extent do you agree that ISIS is a threat to Jordan?



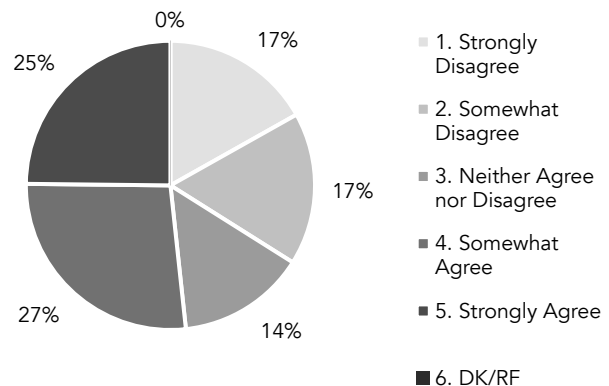
"If ISIS gained more control over Syria and Iraq then it definitely might expand to Jordan and try to enter and carry out terrorist operations in Jordan."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

Whether killed in battle or returning home, former VEO recruits are predominantly viewed with disdain.

There is evidence to suggest that some returning VEO fighters have successfully been reintegrated into Ajloun society. This appears to have been the case with a former ISIS recruit who handed himself over to the Jordanian authorities after spending a year with the organization. After undergoing interrogation and a state security prison sentence, the individual is now reported to be working in a local special education center. That said, whether discussing locals who travelled to Iraq, or those who left for Syria, most respondents indicated that their communities have adopted negative attitudes toward any individuals currently or formerly associated with VEOs in these two countries. For instance, unlike in

Figure 45. To what extent do you agree that returned fighters should be imprisoned?



neighboring Irbid, there have reportedly been no public commemoration events, or ‘martyrs weddings’, for locals who have died fighting in Syria or Iraq.²¹²

In fact, according to some respondents, local VEO recruits – current or former – are regarded as social outcasts, and hostility toward them has notably increased since ISIS’ murder of Moath Al Kasasbeh in January 2015.²¹³ In fact, 52 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed, while 34 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that returned fighters should be imprisoned. In addition, a considerable proportion of locals are at best ambivalent in their attitudes toward such individuals: 14 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that returned fighters should be imprisoned (see Figure 45).

“They do not accept them [locals who have gone to fight abroad] socially, and they perceive them as a bomb that could explode any minute. They do not trust them and they do not trust their children to communicate with them. This could also cause their family and their clan embarrassment.”

(Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

²¹² “Jordan opened the way for people to go and fight in Iraq to defend its land, and some people from Ajloun went. I know a professor named Hussein A’nnab [who went]. They [locals] don’t see them [foreign fighters] as martyrs; they see them as murderers. Two people from Anjara were killed in Syria.” (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²¹³ “Any person who belongs to these groups is looked upon as unnatural, an outcast and unwanted, especially after the murder of the Jordanian pilot Moath Al Kasasbeh.” (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

6.0 EXTERNAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

6.1 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

There is a wide perception that Europe is anti-Islamic.

Mainly with reference to events inside Europe, several respondents deplored the attitude that Western powers have taken toward Islam. Several respondents singled out France as particularly exemplary of anti-Islamic sentiments. One individual, for instance, complained that the country's relative intolerance toward Muslim customs – such as traditional clothing – is to blame for terrorist attacks like the Charlie Hebdo incident in January 2015.²¹⁴ With that in mind, 76 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 20 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the West is humiliating Islam (see Figure 46). Meanwhile, there are indications that a large number of locals retain grudges against France for its historic regional occupation. This is in addition to Britain's regional interventions, including its participation in the 2003 Iraq War.²¹⁵ These indications are implicit in the popularity of TV shows such as 'Bab Al Hara' (MBC Channel), which portrays a Syrian struggle against French and British occupations among other narratives. Such shows may also strengthen the notion of a legitimate jihad against European powers. Indeed, a sizeable 31 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 54 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad in Europe is justifiable (see Figure 47). On the other hand, there was appreciation among respondents for Western exhibitions of tolerance toward Islam and Muslims. For example, one respondent celebrated the appointment of Sadiq Kahn as London Mayor as a victory for inter-religious tolerance in Europe.²¹⁶ Another respondent claimed that locals admire Germany for its attitude toward the Syrian refugee crisis, as well as its social, political and economic policies.²¹⁷ Nonetheless, the overriding opinion of European countries is that they are detrimental to local interests. For example, 61 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that the European Union has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact, while 25 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55).

"[Bab Al Hara] is an Arabic series that depicts the history of Syria and Syrian traditions, and Syrian fights against the French colonization. People love how the Syrians fight back against the French and British occupation." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

²¹⁴ "If it were not [for] [intolerance] toward the hijab in France, the Charlie Hebdo shooting would not have happened. Narrowing freedom for Muslims in France was the reason behind the terrorist attacks." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²¹⁵ "Some people have secret grudges over Britain because it participated with America in the war on Iraq." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

²¹⁶ "Europeans are already very happy with the fact that the mayor of London is Muslim; I don't care whether he is Sunni or Shia. The way Europe is tolerating Islam should be taken into account." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²¹⁷ "People consider Germany a good country that takes care of its citizens. It is a dream to anyone to migrate to Germany. They respect its political stands and how it accepted many Syrian refugees. They also respect its powerful economy." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

Figure 46. To what extent do you agree that the West is humiliating Islam?

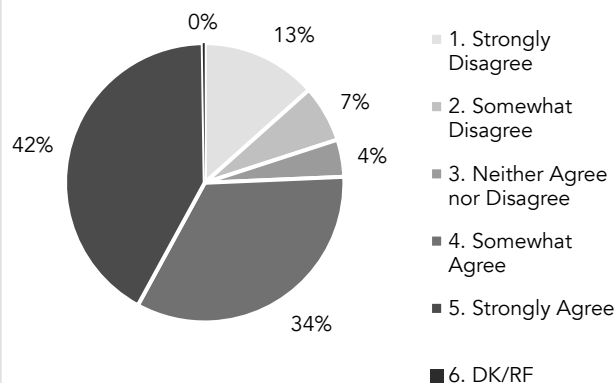
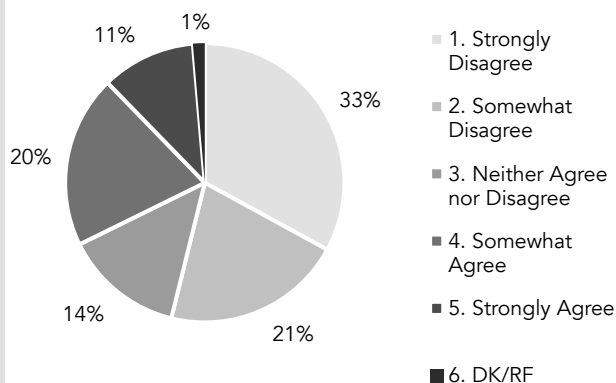


Figure 47. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Europe is justifiable?

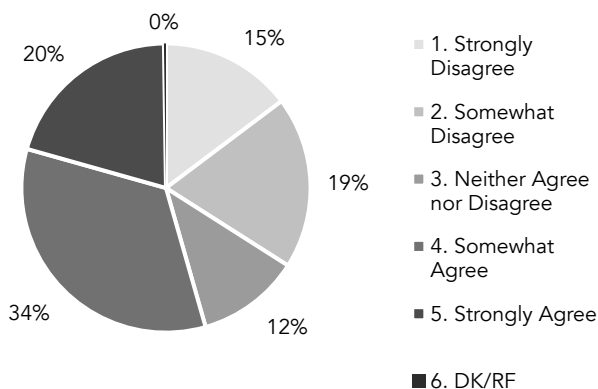


Russia and Iran are unpopular, although respondents avoided discussion of these states' role in the Syrian conflict.

In discussing the regional impact of foreign states, respondents paid very little attention to Iran and Russia. Indeed, perhaps as a precautionary measure, DI respondents barely associated either of these states with the conflict in Syria. This was despite quantitative data, which indicated that 54 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 34 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Iranian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 48). The few mentions that Iran received were related more generally to its Shia orientation. For example, while articulating concerns about a Shia expansion and/or revitalization in Jordan,

respondents recognized Iran as the chief sponsor of regional Shia activities (see section 5.2 Religious Values, Attitudes and Beliefs). Indeed, one respondent implied that strong hostility toward Iran in Ajloun is based entirely on Tehran's representation of Shia interests.²¹⁸ These levels of hostility are nonetheless high, with 78 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reporting that Iran has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact and percent reporting that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). Russia is also highly unpopular, and considered detrimental to Jordanian interests. For example, 70 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that Russia has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative, while 11

Figure 48. To what extent do you agree that Iranian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?



²¹⁸ "People in Ajloun do not like Iran, and that is because of their [the people of Ajloun's] hatred toward the Shias." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). However, as with Iran, locals appear to be reserved in expressing their opposition to Russia. In fact, one of the main local topics of interest relating to the country concerns the apparent beauty of its women.

"There is no aggression toward Russia, even after its interference in Syria. There is a very weird opinion [among] all men in Jordan and specifically in Ajloun regarding Russian girls: they perceive them as the most beautiful women in the world."

(Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

While Turkey is popular, Gulf States draw criticism for providing insufficient financial support to Jordan and failing to share the burden of refugees.

Notwithstanding the Jordanian state's decision to seal its borders with Syria and Iraq following the June 2016 Ruqban attack,²¹⁹ several respondents expressed continued anxieties over the country's border security. One respondent, for instance, identified Jordan's limited resources as a crucial impediment to stronger border controls. Correspondingly, there were complaints that wealthy Gulf countries should be doing more to contribute to regional security by providing financial support to Jordan. Respondents expressed this not only in reference to concerns about regional violence spilling into Jordan, but also to fears of weapons and drugs smuggling. In this respect, one respondent singled out neighboring Saudi Arabia as a key partner with which cooperation should be strengthened.²²⁰ As far as locals are concerned, the consequences of failing to uphold sufficient border controls would be catastrophic.²²¹

In addition to financial neglect, several respondents considered regional states to be guilty of shirking their humanitarian responsibilities. For example, one respondent lamented that Jordan's disproportionate accommodation of refugees was a consequence of other countries' failure to share the burden.²²² One country that is apparently exempt from this criticism is Turkey, which has accommodated the largest number of Syrian refugees of any country – approximately 2.7 million by October 2016.²²³ This contribution to the regional humanitarian burden is likely to at least partly account for Turkey's favorable reputation in Ajloun with regards to its relationship with Jordan. As revealed in quantitative findings, 47 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that Turkey has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive, while 33 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan. It is notable, meanwhile, that 15 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that Turkey has neither a positive nor a negative impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). Although DI respondents barely mentioned the country, there were

²¹⁹ BBC News 2016. 'Jordan declares Syria and Iraq borders closed military zones', BBC News, June 22, 2016.

²²⁰ "We also need to cooperate with Saudi Arabia because we also share borders with them. We have to protect Jordan from smuggling drugs and weapons." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²²¹ "Opening the boarders would destroy Jordan and lead to civil war." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²²² "We are hosting most of the refugees here in Jordan because of the failure of other peripheral countries to do so." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²²³ UNHCR 2016. 'Syria regional refugee response', UNHCR, October 23, 2016.

expressions of respect for President Erdogan. These were focused predominantly on his supposed pursuit of political Islam as well as his personal character.²²⁴

"Gulf countries have money, and if this money was invested in protecting the borders then we would have a more efficient and secure border line."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

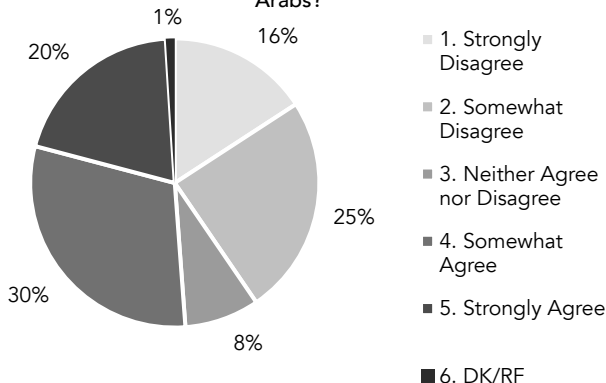
Appalled by its treatment of Palestinians, many hold Israel responsible for local VE and object to the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty.

Consistent with high levels of support for Hamas, some locals deplored what they considered to be unjustified Israeli treatment of Palestinian civilians. This includes the supposed false criminalization and detention of innocent men.²²⁵ It also includes frequent Israeli attempts to limit Palestinian access to Al Aqsa Mosque.²²⁶

One incident that was cited as particular evidence of Israeli injustice was the March 2014 fatal shooting of the Amman-based West Bank judge, Raed Zeiter, by Israeli soldiers on Allenby Bridge.²²⁷ However, it is not only Palestinians and West Bank civilians for whom locals deem Israel an enemy; as one respondent asserted, Israel is an enemy of the entire Arab world.²²⁸

The Israeli presence in Jordan was also a source of resentment among respondents. For example, one individual complained about the existence of an Israeli embassy and Israeli ambassador in Amman, identifying this as a significant driver of local VE attitudes.²²⁹ Likewise, many locals object to Jordan's conciliatory relationship with Israel. For example, in October 2015, Ajloun's residents, along with others across the country, took to the streets demanding that Arab states sever their ties with Israel and impose punitive measures against it.²³⁰ Objection to Jordan's relationship with Israel was also manifest in the fact that 50 percent of GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 41 percent 'strongly' or

Figure 49. To what extent do you agree that the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty is a betrayal for Islam and Arabs?



²²⁴ "The people love Turkey and see much hope in Erdogan's policy as a religious person. There is clear loyalty and appreciation of Erdogan's character and decisions." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

²²⁵ "Israelis are arresting Palestinians for no rational reasons." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²²⁶ "Yesterday, Israel tried to ban 400,000 Palestinians from praying." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²²⁷ Rudoren, Jodi 2014. 'Jordanian judge killed by Israeli soldiers at border crossing', The New York Times, March 10, 2014.

²²⁸ "People in Ajloun do not like Israel and consider it an enemy for them and all Arabs." (Female, 39, Researcher, Ajloun)

²²⁹ "The presence of the Israeli ambassador and the Israeli embassy is one of the main reasons [for VE]. They decorate the embassy on the independence day." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

²³⁰ Freij, Muath 2015. 'Protesters rally around Jordan in support of Palestine', The Jordan Times, October 18, 2015.

'somewhat' disagreed that the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty is a betrayal for Islam and Arabs (see Figure 49). It is perhaps unsurprising then, that locals are embracing VEOs on the basis of their opposition to Israel. Not to mention Hamas' popularity, this may be manifest in the notable degree of support and impartiality Hezbollah has received in Ajloun (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs). The idea that Israel is responsible for local VE was also suggested in quantitative findings, as 82 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that Israel has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative, while just 11 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55).

Controversially, considering the overwhelming intense local objection to Israel discussed here, one individual expressed gratitude at Israel's contributions to Jordan's safety.²³¹ One example is Israel's donation in July 2015 of a fleet of combat helicopters to occupy airspace at Jordan's Iraq and Syria borders.²³² Another example is Israel's deployment of surveillance drones on the Jordan-Israeli border as a measure against potential ISIS attacks on Jordan.²³³

"One of the main reasons for extremism is the existence of Israel in the region. People say that our government supports Israel. And all these groups [VEOs] are against Israel."

(Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

²³¹ "In Jordan, we consider Israel involved in keeping Jordan safe because we share borders. Israel is interested in keeping Jordan safe because any political change in Jordan affects Israel." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

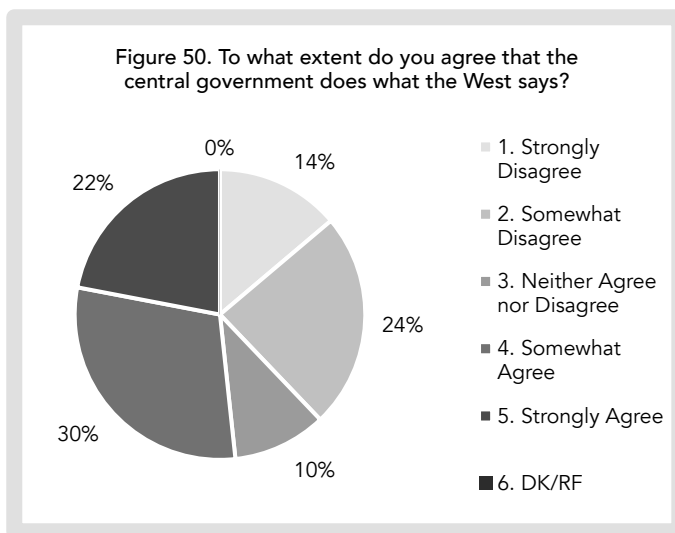
²³² Reuters 2015. 'Israel gives Jordan helicopters for border security – U.S. source', Reuters, July 23, 2015.

²³³ Labott, Elise & Jeremy Diamond 2015. 'Israel bolsters ties to Jordan as ISIS looms', CNN, February 06, 2015.

6.2 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC INTERVENTIONISM

Many hold reservations about Jordan's role in the international coalition, although the majority considers it justified.

After lending Jordan's weight to the US-led anti-ISIS coalition in late 2014,²³⁴ King Abdullah II faced a wave of public outcry against the decision, including from the MB and several members of parliament.²³⁵ The IAF, for example, publicly complained that Jordan had no business participating in the coalition and objected to the US' use of Jordanian territory for military operations.²³⁶ Similarly, in February 2015, following ISIS' murder of Moath Al Kasasbeh, there were questions being raised among the public about Jordan's role alongside a Western-led operation. These points are likely to have fed into a widespread perception that the Jordanian government is subservient to



Western interests. For example, 52 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 38 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the central government does what the West says (see Figure 50). Furthermore, many perceive Jordan's submission to Western interests as damaging to the security of the country. This was also evident in quantitative findings, which indicated that 45 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 41 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 51). The idea that the country's intervention in Syria might be domestically disruptive may have been influenced by events surrounding ISIS' murder of Moath Al Kasasbeh. For example, after the incident, some locals began making links between Jordan's cooperation with anti-ISIS coalition forces and Al Kasasbeh's murder,²³⁷ and protests erupted in the pilot's hometown of Karak, where demonstrators targeted the governor's building.²³⁸ There were consequent fears among locals in Ajloun that elements of the public – namely those from Karak with links to Al Kasasbeh – would begin destabilizing the country.²³⁹ Meanwhile, there

²³⁴ Drennan, Justine 2014. 'Who has contributed what in the coalition against the Islamic State?', Foreign Policy, November 12, 2014.

²³⁵ Schenker, David 2014. 'There's a worrisome amount of support in Jordan for the Islamic State', The New Republic, October 20, 2014.

²³⁶ Al Sharif, Osama 2014. 'Jordanians divided over anti-IS coalition', Al Monitor, September 15, 2014.

²³⁷ "After ISIS killed the Jordanian pilot Al Kasasbeh, some Jordanians wanted to blame the government for participating in the war against ISIS." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²³⁸ Finch, Ben 2015. 'Jordan vows to avenge Kasasbeh's murder', Open Democracy, February 10, 2015.

²³⁹ "There were fears that the pilot's family would accuse the government and the army for sending him to fight in Syria, which might have caused an interior conflict between the people and the government. The first 24 hours after the execution were very critical and dangerous." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

are indications that significant elements among Ajloun's public continue to hold reservations about Jordan's role in the international coalition. For example, a considerable 25 percent minority of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 61 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Jordanian intervention against ISIS is justifiable (see Figure 52). The fact that the majority approves of the government's reinforced resolve against ISIS was also evident in discussions with respondents. One individual, for instance, was enthused that the government has substantially weakened ISIS in its Raqqa stronghold as a result of its intensified air campaign against the organization since February 2015.

"Regarding Moath Al Kasasbeh's case, there was a firm Jordanian attitude toward ISIS, and there was a suitable reaction by the Jordanian air force that weakened, according to the air forces' declaration, an approximate 20 percent of the security capability of Raqqa City."

(Male, 35, Youth Group coordinator, Ajloun)

Figure 51. To what extent do you agree that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?

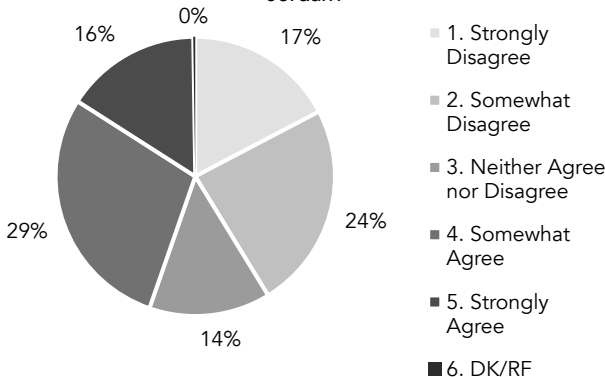
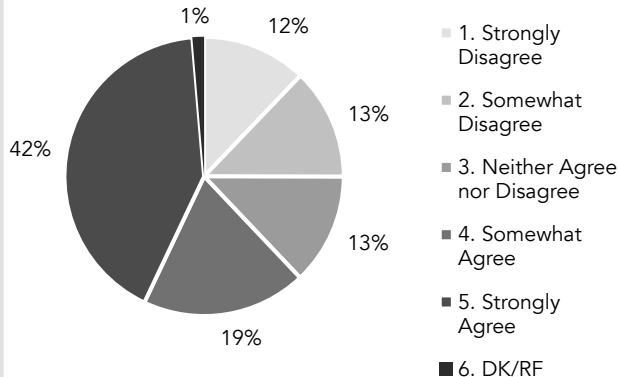


Figure 52. To what extent do you agree that Jordanian intervention against ISIS is justifiable?



Western regional intervention draws criticism for its detrimental impact on civilian lives and constitutes a powerful driver of VE.

In attributing blame for current and recent regional turmoil, some respondents highlighted the harmful consequences of US intervention. For example, one individual held the US responsible for uprooting families in Iraq, disrupting local economies, plundering regional resources, and causing large numbers of civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴⁰ Another respondent drew links between the US 2003 invasion of

²⁴⁰ "First of all, I blame America for occupying Iraq and Afghanistan and killing Iraqi and Afghani innocent civilians. Secondly, I blame America for the people who lost their jobs, houses and education because of the American war. Many people became refugees." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Iraq and the proliferation of the illegal arms trade and drug smuggling in Jordan.²⁴¹ More generally, several respondents accused the West of facilitating the rise of VEOs and, by extension, the destabilization of Syria.²⁴² In fact, one respondent suggested that the US, alongside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), has actively assisted VEOs through weapons provision. This was in reference to these countries' donation of firearms intended for Syrian opposition forces,²⁴³ which featured in a corruption case involving GID officers (see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance). These perceptions of Western injustices toward Muslim civilians and regional exploitation provide a powerful recruitment drive for VEOs, as locals seek opportunities to contribute toward a regional resistance.²⁴⁴ Indeed, 57 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 38 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Western intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 53). Likewise, the US' regional presence is a major factor accounting for local endorsement of foreign fighters. In fact, some respondents were forthright in identifying a close link between outrage at the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the rise in local VE. It was therefore unsurprising then that 61 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that the US has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact, while 28 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). The US' presence inside Jordan itself is also widely considered to be compounding VE threats in the country. This is manifest in quantitative findings revealing that 55 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 31 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Western intervention in Jordan is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 54). This probably relates to US military operations inside the country, such as its presence at the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center since 2009,²⁴⁵ as well as its training and equipping of Syrian oppositional forces as noted above. Indeed, there are indications that a US military presence has provoked violent attacks in the past, such as the November 2015 mass shooting at the Jordan International Police Training Center in Muwaqqar (Amman).²⁴⁶

On the other hand, there were several views that conflicted with the majority regarding the West's regional activities. For example, having observed numerous atrocities being committed during conflict in neighboring countries, one respondent decried the lack, rather than the excess, of intervention by international powers.²⁴⁷ Indeed, a sense of Western inertia in relation to the Syrian conflict may be contributing to a strong sense of duty among local youth to lend their efforts to the conflict in defense of fellow Muslims. Driving this sense of obligation is a common understanding of issues facing the global

²⁴¹ "After the American invasion of Iraq, followed by what happened in Syria, we all started noticing illegal weapons with people. The black market in Jordan flourished with weapons and arms, as well as drug dealing." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

²⁴² "Western countries are blamed [for] helping some people to form organizations and to sabotage Syria." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

²⁴³ "I read an article in Al Quds Al Arabi newspaper that officers from the Jordanian intelligence unit have stolen weapons that were sent by America and Saudi [Arabia] for these extremist groups." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

²⁴⁴ "I would definitely leave to help Muslim brothers who are getting killed, and [if] a foreign country is stealing my brothers' country's resources." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²⁴⁵ Staton, Bethan 2015. 'Questions linger after shooting at US training camp in Jordan', Middle East Eye, November 10, 2015.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ "Countries are looking at people getting killed and none of them intervened. Youth started thinking of extremism." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Ummah (Islamic community).²⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the ability of VEOs to present themselves as liberation organizations on behalf of innocent Muslim civilians is likely to have a powerful resonance with such youths (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives).

"There are people who support [local foreign fighters] and they say: yes, why not; America killed the people so let's fight America. Why are they [the US] coming to our land? That's what I heard from my husband's uncle."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

Figure 53. To what extent do you agree that Western intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?

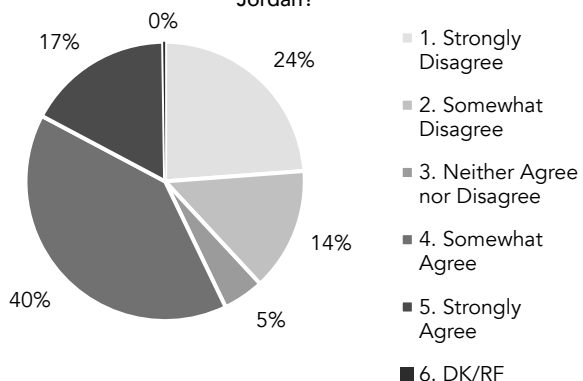
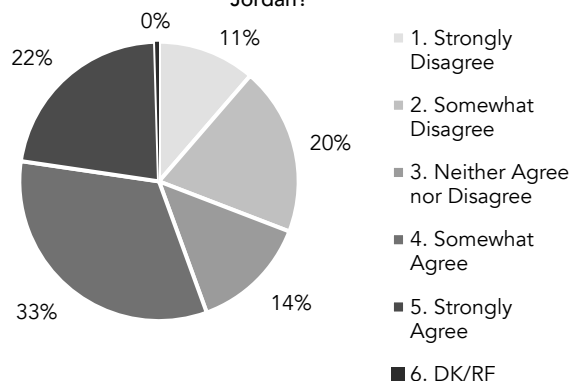


Figure 54. To what extent do you agree that Western intervention in Jordan is fueling VE in Jordan?



Many accuse Gulf States of sponsoring VEOs and cultivating VE attitudes.

It is widely reported that Gulf States have been complicit in financing regional VEOs. Chief among these donors are sources in Kuwait, Qatar and the KSA, which have allegedly lent financial stimulus to ISIS and JN.²⁴⁹ Indeed, most respondents articulated suspicions that Gulf States are responsible for sustaining VEOs in Syria, including JN. These suspicions, partly fueled by the media,²⁵⁰ apply to discursive stimulus as well as material sponsorship. One respondent, for instance, criticized these states for spreading

²⁴⁸ "At the beginning, he was using terms like 'war', 'rape' and 'people burning Muslims alive'. He stated that he wanted to do something but he was incapable of doing it. He was saying that countries are not moving to help those people, and that we should make a youth movement to help them. He was then convinced that he needed to go and defend Islam. He believes that Muslims are his family and he is supposed to help them. He was saying that he is supposed to help the Muslim women that get killed or raped since they are his sisters. Why are we watching them? We should go and help them." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²⁴⁹ Rogin, Josh 2014. 'America's allies are funding ISIS', The Daily Beast, June 14, 2014.

²⁵⁰ "Gulf countries do support and fund terrorism and everyone knows that through the news and the media." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

extremist ideologies,²⁵¹ perhaps in reference to the KSA's sponsorship and dissemination of global Wahhabism.²⁵² Similarly, another respondent decried the inflammatory activities of Gulf sheikhs, accusing them of inciting Sunni-Shia sectarian attitudes in local youth through their televised lectures.²⁵³ One prominent Gulf sheikh who draws criticism from locals in Ajloun is the Saudi preacher, Mohammed Al Arefe (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives). Notwithstanding these findings, the majority of respondents were enthusiastic about the KSA's influence. For example, 56 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that Saudi Arabia has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive, while 31 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). This enthusiasm is most likely in consideration of the KSA's significant financial stimulus to Jordan through the Saudi Fund for Development,²⁵⁴ in addition to its powerful representation of Sunni Islam. A third possible factor is that respondents were exercising caution in light of anti-terror laws that issue punishments for those charged with undermining Jordan's relationship with foreign states. For example, in February 2015, the state security court sentenced the MB's Zaki Bani Irsheid to 18 months imprisonment for criticizing the United Arab Emirates (UAE).²⁵⁵

"There is no doubt that there is blame on Gulf countries for funding Al Nusra [JN] and anti-regime movements. No one can fund but them because they have the money."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

The Syrian regime is highly unpopular and some accuse President Assad of intentionally seeking to sow discord in Jordan.

Many respondents were cautious about expressing strong opinions when discussing President Assad. However, several others were unrestrained in vilifying him and accusing him of sectarian 'oppression' against civilians, which they correspondingly blame for Syria's current plight. Likewise, respondents held President Assad responsible for uprooting the large numbers of refugees that have sought asylum in Jordan.²⁵⁶ Indeed, one respondent accused the Syrian President of systematically attempting to destabilize Jordan and sending spies disguised as refugees into the country.²⁵⁷ This correlates with

²⁵¹ "I believe that several Arab countries in the Middle East are exporting radicalization." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²⁵² Armstrong, Karen 2014. 'Wahhabism to ISIS: How Saudi Arabia exported the main source of global terrorism', The New Statesman, November 27, 2014.

²⁵³ "We hear about sheikhs from the Gulf who do these lectures on TV channels and claim they want to stop the Shia extension in the region. [We] blame the Gulf countries for these speeches, and the countries themselves are talking about the Shia advancement [...] some sheiks spread sectarianism a lot lately." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

²⁵⁴ Albawaba Business 2015. 'Saudi fund grants \$218M aid for Jordan infrastructure, development projects', Albawaba Business, December 01, 2015.

²⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch 2015. 'Jordan: 18 months for criticizing UAE', HRW, February 19, 2015.

²⁵⁶ "Sure, we blame Bashar Al Assad for this situation because half of his people are here, and as you know the situation of our country [is] bad." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

²⁵⁷ "Bashar [Al Assad] sends spies as refugees. I suggest for the government to hire psychologists and psychiatrists with the army to find the spies. Bashar sends these spies. This bastard, he wants to destroy Jordan." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

reports from 2012 detailing the Jordanian government's exposure of Syrian Army defectors operating as spies in Mafraq.²⁵⁸ It is supposedly these infiltrators who are responsible for the numerous terrorist attacks that Jordan has endured since 2011.²⁵⁹ Meanwhile, although respondents detected a distinct increase in VE attitudes since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, it was apparently even more noticeable since the Syrian conflict erupted after 2011.

In addition to President Assad, there were expressions of antipathy to other figures representing the Syrian regime. Notable among these is the former Syrian ambassador to Jordan, Bahjat Suleiman. One respondent denounced Suleiman for the offence he caused the public while occupying the position, and connected this to the escalation in local extremist attitudes and support for VEOs.²⁶⁰ Indeed, Suleiman's provocations led to his expulsion from Amman in May 2014.²⁶¹ Consistent with the findings discussed here, 62 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents reported that Syria has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact, while 22 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55).

"Bashar [Al Assad] is a dictator who oppressed Syrians and marginalized most of them. He kept the sovereignty of Syria in the hands of his sect. The mistakes that happened in Syria created a state of general security chaos."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

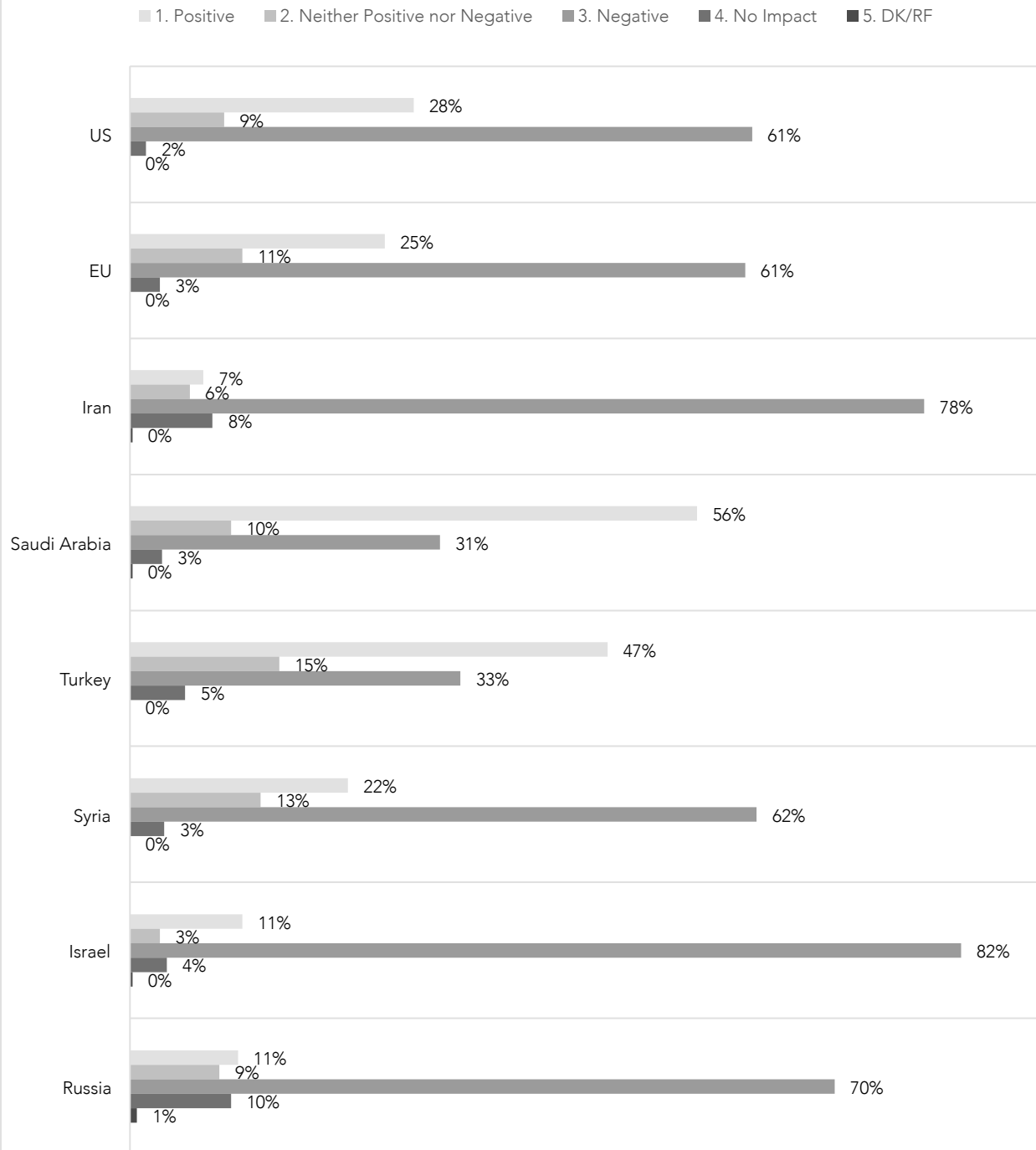
²⁵⁸ Haddadi, Anissa 2012. 'Jordan arrests 10 "army defectors" on suspicion of spying for Bashar al-Assad', International Business Times, March 26, 2012.

²⁵⁹ "They [President Assad's spies] are the ones who did the bombings." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²⁶⁰ "At the time, when the Syrian ambassador was in Amman, a few statements were announced which had a role [in provoking extremism]." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

²⁶¹ MEE staff 2014. 'Jordan and Syria expel ambassadors', Middle East Eye, May 26, 2014.

Figure 55. To what extent do you think that the following countries have a positive or negative impact on Jordan?

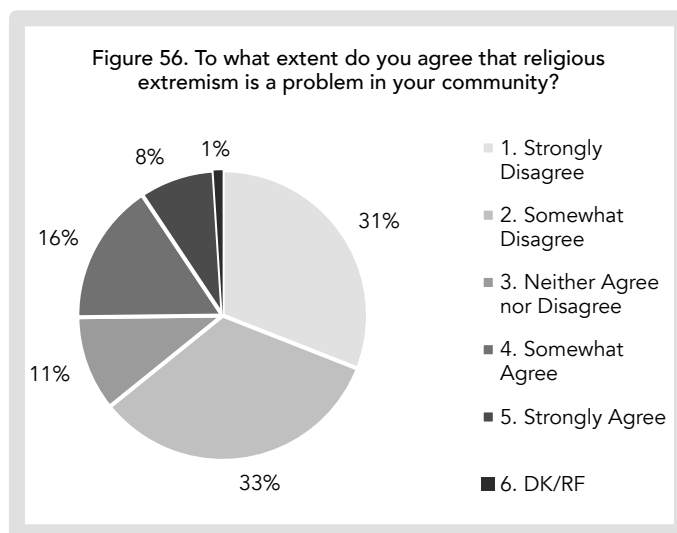


7.0 COMMUNICATION DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

7.1 THE ROLE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROPAGANDA

Alleged extremist preachers have used mosques as platforms from which to promote their ideologies.

Some respondents refused to acknowledge that local preachers are inciting VE.²⁶² Indeed, there is generally little acknowledgement among Ajloun's population that radical Islam has a presence in the governorate. This was evident in quantitative findings, which indicated that 64 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, while 24 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that religious extremism is a problem in their community (see Figure 56). However, it became evident through discussions with many respondents that certain religious leaders are indeed advancing extremist ideas. For example, some local imams – notably in suburban areas such as Ayn



Janna (Ajloun district) – are referring to VEOs as legitimate jihadist groups rather than terrorist organizations.²⁶³ Testament to this is the fact that a number of locals have been convicted of inciting VE through Friday prayers. This includes Mohammad Ali A'kasheh Al Momani, who has worked as a lecturer at the National University of Ajloun. Based in central Sakhray district, Al Momani is a sheikh of the Momani tribe. A second example is Ali Al Faqir, a sheikh of the Rababah tribe based in Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district). Since being banned from preaching, he has relocated to Amman. A third example is Theyab Abu Seni, the former imam of Sa'ed Bin Abi Waqas Mosque located in Al Hashemiyyah. These individuals are likely to have been exposed by GID officials, who reportedly visit local mosques undercover. While knowledge of this surveillance has apparently discouraged many extremist preachers, numerous local imams are continuing, at least implicitly, to lend credibility to VEOs during Friday prayers, portraying groups such as ISIS in positive terms.²⁶⁴ Local youth exposed to this are consequently developing benign images of such groups.²⁶⁵ Aside from this public radicalization, there are indications

²⁶² "I have never seen any sheikh that encouraged extremism or violence." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²⁶³ "Some mosque sheikhs don't consider Nusra [JN] and Daesh [ISIS] terrorists, but jihadists." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

²⁶⁴ "[Local sheikhs] try to promote them [VEOs] positively and trick the youth." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

²⁶⁵ "The sheikhs who pray with the people and deliver the Friday sermon and who call indirectly to support Daesh and hold the Absentee prayer for the ones who get killed among Daesh – this influences the youth and the children and lets them be convinced that they are non-extremist groups." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

that more direct and surreptitious targeting by violent extremists also occurs in the mosque environment, during gatherings after the main prayer.²⁶⁶

Several respondents explained that extremist preachers occasionally come from elsewhere in order to promote political organizations and VEOs during Friday prayers. Thus, regardless of their origin, local clerics have evidently had a degree of freedom in disseminating their own Islamic interpretations, extremist or otherwise, among their congregations.²⁶⁷ For example, one respondent explained that a 35-year-old man from a village in Sakhrāh used to participate in Salafist Jihadist preaching campaign groups that targeted local mosques.²⁶⁸ Apparently, these groups are still active at the time of writing, at least in Sakhrāh, where they deliver sermons and give religious lessons to congregations.²⁶⁹ The 35 year-old in question later went on to join ISIS, to which he was reportedly recruited via the local Salafist Jihadist network. Inherent in this dynamic is the value of physical communication for the purposes of VEO recruitment drives.

"There are some imams who talk in the Friday speeches. They talk and talk. They seem like they are pushing youth to extremism and to join extremist groups. In one of the Friday speeches, a [stranger] asked the imam if he could give the Friday speech and the imam accepted. The strange person urged youth to join political parties and groups."

(Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

VEOs allegedly employ 'middle men' to promote their ideologies and recruit using appropriate incentives.

In seeking to understand how local youth are approached by VEOs, many respondents contended that paid 'middle men' act on behalf of such organizations at the local level, identifying potential recruits and promoting VEO ideologies. These individuals are also supposedly tasked with persuading prospective recruits by using appropriate incentives, whether material or ideological.²⁷⁰ It is also these 'middle men' who are thought to be instrumental in the bargaining and logistical process of transferring recruits to VEO strongholds.²⁷¹ This may have been the case with a 35-year-old man from Kufranjah district who went on to join JI. Before travelling to Syria as a JI recruit, the individual reportedly made frequent trips to

²⁶⁶ "They [violent extremists] can only recruit through mosques but secretly – when people gather after the prayer in the mosque." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

²⁶⁷ "Preachers play a role [in encouraging VE] by their wrong presentation about Islam." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁶⁸ "He was known to people as a religious extremist and he's from the Salafist Jihadist [current]. He always used to go out with preaching campaigns." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

²⁶⁹ "Every once in a while, a group of people come – I believe Salafis – and stay there for three to four days. They hold religious lessons and sermons for the guys." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

²⁷⁰ "Brokers have to find individuals and play with their minds using religious or economical motives. I know some people who were affected but I can't talk about them." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁷¹ "Brokers that work with these extremist groups: they gather these individuals [recruits], make a deal with them and then smuggle them out of Jordan to join these groups [VEOs]." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Ramtha (Irbid), where he would stay for several days before returning home.²⁷² According to the man's wife, he refused to disclose whom he was meeting and where exactly they met on such occasions. However, it is reasonable to assume that the man was meeting VEO 'middle men' on these trips. That is in consideration of the fact that it was after one such trip that the individual in question disappeared only later to announce his arrival into Syria, which he reportedly reached via Lebanon.

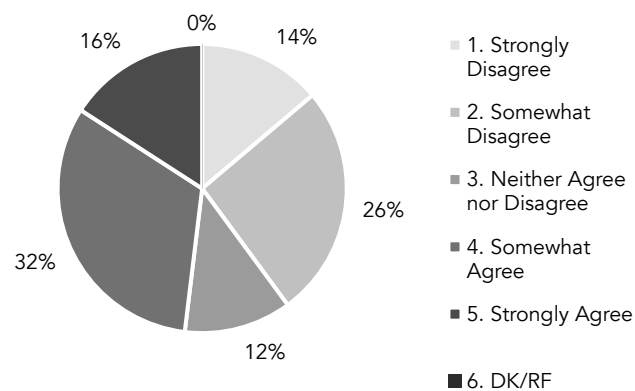
"There is no doubt that in every society there are promoters of terrorist ideology – they take money to be middle people. The people who join ISIS cannot do it on their own; this middle person takes money to do his job."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

VEOs target recruits through social media and other online material, where they advance their ideologies using religious messaging.

Aside from employing 'middle men' at the local level, some respondents maintained that VEO operatives target recruits through social media – notably Facebook. Here, they are thought to adopt false identities as they promote VEO ideologies using religious messaging. This includes phrases from the Qur'an and the Hadith,²⁷³ notably those that can be interpreted or manipulated in such a way as to endorse violent jihad. Indeed, many respondents singled out Facebook as the main social media platform where VEO operatives effectively identify and radicalize individuals and win their loyalties.²⁷⁴ In some cases, this appears to be achieved through the Facebook Chat application.²⁷⁵ Twitter and WhatsApp are thought to be additional platforms through which VEOs communicate with prospective recruits in Ajloun. For example, several respondents recognized the former as a crucial platform from which ISIS circulates its ideologies, and the latter as a VEO tool for

Figure 57. To what extent do you agree that the Internet/social media is fueling VE in Jordan?



²⁷² "Several times he used to tell me that he was heading to Irbid or Ramtha, and he would stay there for a few days and come back." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

²⁷³ "They [VEOs] use certain phrases, like the Prophet's Hadiths and Qur'anic verses." (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

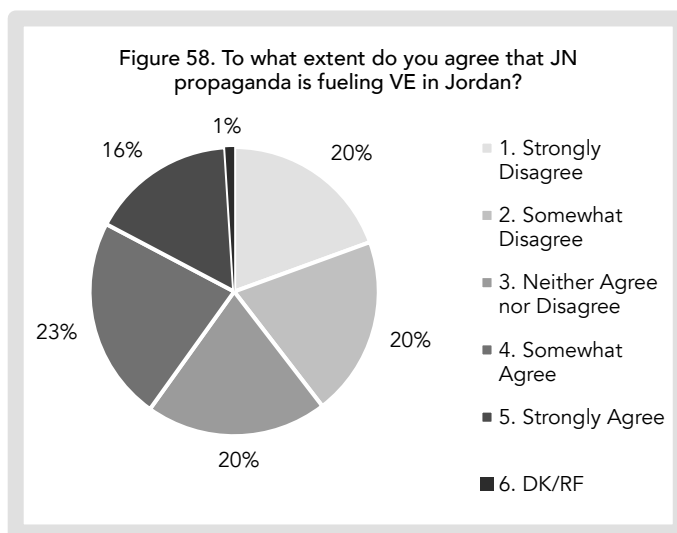
²⁷⁴ "Using Facebook conversations, online recruiters brainwash the targets and convince them to join extremist groups." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²⁷⁵ "My husband changed after [becoming acquainted with] these groups [Salafist Jihadists]. Maybe [they communicated] through the Internet because we didn't [used to] have the Internet. But he brought an Internet subscription on his phone and was spending most of his time on Facebook Chat." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

arranging logistical matters relating to recruitment.²⁷⁶ Respondents considered VEO exploitation of the online platforms discussed here to be very powerful. Indeed, 48 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 40 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the Internet/social media is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 57).

There are concerns that youth would rather watch short videos posted by VEOs than read the long essays put out by CVE groups and security agencies.

Respondents also mentioned less direct targeting by VEOs – namely JN and AQ – whose online videos and images as published on sites such as YouTube and Instagram are feared to be resonating with local youth.²⁷⁷ Indeed, although 40 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed, a considerable 39 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that JN propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan. Significantly, 20 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 58). One element of VEO media material's appeal to young people is its accessibility. As one respondent noted, the public is much more inclined toward short, visual media sources as typically produced by VEOs than it is toward the in-depth analytical pieces of security experts.²⁷⁸ Thus, there is a risk that the latter are overlooked in favor of the former. The fact that the majority of young people in Ajloun access the Internet on personal smartphones compounds these concerns, as it inhibits the ability for elders to monitor their activity.²⁷⁹



"They [VEOs] use religious slogans through social media because it is their tool. They use fake names and fake phone numbers and fake addresses to make people work with them."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²⁷⁶ "They start contacting each other using WhatsApp or Twitter. The groups' recruiters arrange the leaving process that happens through the border." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

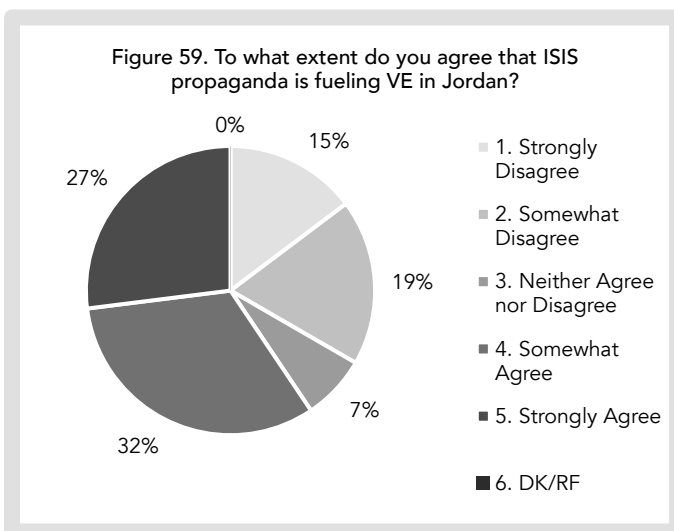
²⁷⁷ "We fear the youngsters are adopting extremism through social media networks of Al Qa'ida and Jabhat Al Nusra, which are completely different from any previous extremist movements, using YouTube, Facebook and Instagram in order to target the youth." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²⁷⁸ "We get news of 1200 words about extremism: who would read that? No one. However, these groups [VEOs] might publish a 20 second video on YouTube, a message, a picture or a four-five word post which many people will read and view." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

²⁷⁹ "[The youths are] all using cellphones to access social networking." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

ISIS media activity has had a mixed reception, occasionally generating hatred but also attracting public admiration.

While a central component of ISIS' media campaigns is the presentation of gory violence as a means of stoking fear in the viewer, this has simultaneously undermined its reputation in Ajloun. For example, the organization's publication of a video showing the immolation of Moath Al Kasasbeh has been widely watched in Ajloun to the horror of viewers. One respondent, for instance, claimed that the video served to confirm that ISIS is comparable to the ancient takfirist group, the *Khawarij*, and sparked public outrage against the organization, including from some of those with previous loyalties toward it. Meanwhile, however, quantitative findings suggested that a



large proportion of Ajloun's population regards ISIS' media activity as an effective stimulant to radicalization: 59 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 34 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that ISIS propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 59). Indeed, some of the organization's media initiatives appear to have played into its favor. For example, the group's main musical anthem, "Salil Al Sawarim," is widely popular across Jordan for its sonic qualities. In fact, the song's accompanying video on YouTube generated much discussion in Ajloun, thus facilitating ISIS' renown if nothing else.²⁸⁰ The lyrics of the song are focused on promoting violent jihad, which has frightened some locals who already fear ISIS' presence in Jordan. Yet, on the other hand, elements of the population have used the song and its video as a topic of mockery against ISIS. Indeed, this has been facilitated by numerous satirical performances of the production, including a "Gangnam Style" parody, which is available on YouTube.²⁸¹

"This video proves how brutal Daesh and any terrorist group or Kharijites are; the video of Jordanian pilot Moath Al Kasasbeh's burning sparked Jordanians' wrath. One pro-Daesh [individual] even abandoned his support to the group after watching the video."

(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²⁸⁰ "There has been a video called 'Salil Al Sawarim' that people talked about but was deleted from YouTube." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

²⁸¹ Mostafa Eldeeb 2015. 'ISIS dancing on (saleel alsawareem Egyptian style)', March 4, 2015, YouTube, accessed November 17, 2016.

7.2 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

For some individuals, media coverage of regional conflict has facilitated national unity in Jordan.

Although Jordan witnessed numerous street demonstrations in 2011 and 2012 during the ‘Arab Spring’, they did not escalate into serious violent confrontation. Indeed, compared with other regional countries, Jordan’s protests were peaceful and short-lived. One respondent recognized this, highlighting the media’s continuous coverage of turmoil in other Arab States – notably Syria and Iraq – as being crucial in deterring an escalation of local protests and a widening of national divisions.²⁸² For some locals, coverage of regional violence, including that of VEOs, has also served as a deterrent against VE and VEO recruitment.²⁸³ One route through which this may be occurring is that audiences are regarding such violence as un-Islamic,²⁸⁴ thus countering the propaganda of VEOs. Indeed, several respondents concluded that the media has thus played a crucial role in uniting Jordanians against VE. This also relates to domestic events, such as the March 2016 raid on an alleged ISIS cell in Irbid. As claimed by one respondent, the early media coverage of the incident served to create a bond between the public and the security forces.²⁸⁵

“This affected us in Jordan, because the media opened the way for everyone to see what happened in Syria and Iraq. This made Jordanians more united than ever to fight this extremism and not allow it to reach Jordan.”

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

Media depictions of global atrocities against Muslims are fueling local VE.

A continuous stream of media attention focusing on persecuted Muslims across the globe is providing substance for Salafist Jihadists to more convincingly advance elements of their agenda. This is true of events in Syria and Iraq, as well as the victimization of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.²⁸⁶ One respondent explained that local religious leaders are successfully incorporating such evidence as a motivating factor in their promotion of jihad, including in Syria and Iraq. As well as feeding the rhetoric of extremists, media coverage of violence toward Muslims is being consumed directly via sources such as YouTube, as well as

²⁸² “Jordan is also dependent on the media and TV series in order to reunite the Jordanian community. When Jordanians demonstrated, they did it in a very civilized way.” (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²⁸³ “What we see on television is killing and murdering. I find it very strange how people support them [VEOs].” (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²⁸⁴ “Religion stops people [from going to Syria] sometimes; when they see people getting killed they realize that this is not true religion.” (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²⁸⁵ “When Operation Irbid occurred, the social media had a major role in uniting Jordanians and the security forces.” (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

²⁸⁶ Al Jazeera Investigative Unit 2015. ‘Exclusive: “strong evidence” of genocide in Myanmar’, Al Jazeera, October 28, 2015.

social media outlets.²⁸⁷ One respondent confirmed that, when confronted with such scenes – especially violence toward Sunni women and children in Syria and Iraq – VE is more likely to take hold, notably in the form of sectarian attitudes.²⁸⁸ The same respondent singled out Al Jazeera as being complicit to this end, associating the Qatari news channel with Wahhabism.²⁸⁹ With these points in mind, and contrary to complaints about the extent of state press interference (see section 4.3 Human Rights and Civil Liberties), one respondent lamented the lack of leverage that the Jordanian government has over media sources.²⁹⁰

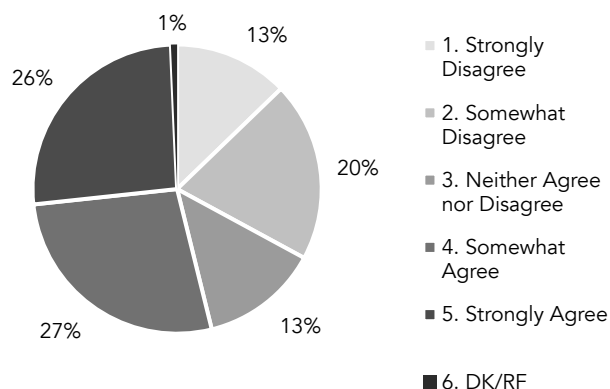
“Let’s talk about Iraq and Syria. We see people getting killed, tortured, and burned alive - not just in Iraq and Syria, but also in Burma: Muslims are being burned alive in Burma. These scenes affected our preachers and made them tell people to go and fight in order to defend other Muslims. People started thinking about going to Syria and Iraq.”

(Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

Local news channels are subject to criticism for amplifying the perception that Jordan is descending into disorder.

There was a common perception among respondents that violence in Jordan is on the rise. However, these perceptions were based more on national incidents as presented in the media than on first-hand local encounters. Nonetheless, a sense of increasing insecurity is creating anxieties among locals, especially when they encounter news items relating to violence in nearby areas such as Deir Abi Said in Irbid. The media has also fed anxieties relating to the notion that Syrian refugees are the source of local violent extremism. According to one respondent, it is local, as well as regional news channels and websites that are responsible in this respect, having broadcast and published news items about disturbances among refugees.²⁹¹ These news organizations include Al Jazeera, Saraya News, Ammon News and Khaberni News. Similarly, ISIS’ reputation as the most active VEO in Jordan largely

Figure 60. To what extent do you agree that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan?



²⁸⁷ “He was not aware of what was going on. Then he started seeing videos and pictures on YouTube and social media. For example, a picture of a dead Syrian kid.” (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²⁸⁸ “The events that are happening in Syria and Iraq, such as the killing of Sunni people, and killing of children and women, [could] have a huge effect and increase sectarianism, violence and extremism.” (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁸⁹ “There are a lot of channels: the most dangerous are Wahhabist, like Al Jazeera.” (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁹⁰ “The government has no control over the media.” (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

²⁹¹ “The problems that the refugees make: although there aren’t many refugees in Ajloun – only a few families – we hear of problems from refugees on the news.” (Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

stems from media reportage relating to the activities of alleged ISIS cells in the country.²⁹² Several respondents, however, were more skeptical of such media output, complaining that the media exaggerates security threats, including those posed by VEOs.²⁹³ This view is widely held across the governorate, as captured by quantitative findings, which indicated that 53 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 33 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan (see Figure 60).

"Fights happen every now and then. We hear about fights in Irbid or in Deir Abi Said: this is very bad. Before, fights used to happen in universities for sure, and we used to hear about wounded people. But now we hear about people killed during fights in universities – we never heard about that [before]. But now it's happening. The case of community extremism has to be cured."

(Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

Private and Internet media are accused of manipulating truths and promoting VE.

In particular reference to private media outlets, respondents were critical of the support that news platforms have provided for organizations such as ISIS. This, they claimed, has been instrumental in radicalizing local youth. According to a respondent who misidentified the channel as a Syrian production, one such platform is the Palestinian Satellite Channel, Al Quds T. He blamed the news outlet for depicting the Syrian conflict with a bias in favor of oppositional forces.²⁹⁴ Similarly, another respondent maintained that the media is manipulating information to certain ends, such as falsely attributing responsibility for catastrophic events in order to vilify the Assad regime in Syria.²⁹⁵ One respondent was also wary of the way in which the media presents information relating to Russian atrocities within Syria.²⁹⁶ Accordingly, many locals are suspicious of the validity of media output, especially that which is channeled through social media.²⁹⁷ This is particularly the case with local Internet news outlets, which are deemed exceptionally suspect.²⁹⁸

²⁹² "According to what we hear on the news, ISIS is the most active group [in Jordan]. We hear about sabotage groups that belong to ISIS and try to affect Jordan and [conduct terrorist] operations. The media always talks about arresting groups that belong to ISIS in Jordan." (Male, 38, Repairman, Ajloun)

²⁹³ "ISIS shows up in certain events, Al Qa'ida shows up in other events, and Al Nusra [JN] as well. The media exaggerates what they do." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

²⁹⁴ "During the Syrian crisis, the Quds channel, which is Syrian, was broadcasting the war partially in a very different way to how the other international channels were broadcasting it. It was targeting and motivating the anti-regime stance." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

²⁹⁵ "Most of the videos are being edited to create a huge effect. For example, they might get a video of a natural disaster and tell the people that Bashar's regime killed all of these in the video." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

²⁹⁶ "How media talks about the Russian intervention in Syria and how many innocents Russia killed there: this would have an effect on people's feelings." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁹⁷ "The media impact that happens through social media websites: [this is] where people can tarnish truths and incite violence." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

²⁹⁸ "Unfortunately, Jordanian websites give incorrect information." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

"The media now is divided into two sectors: one is the governmental media that is controlled by the country and its policies, and the other is private which is seeking fame and money. The private media doesn't care how to get its money – that's why it promotes for ISIS and extremism and conflicts. The role of the media is very important; it has to encourage the whole world to fight extremism and violence. But if the media diverged from this role and became bribed and personal, then this a main reason effecting the youth to become extremists."

(Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

7.3 THE ROLE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Local and regional Salafist Jihadists are persuasively advocating for a Syrian jihad with the aid of Qur'anic text.

To complement the promotion of VEOs as Islamic resistance groups (see below), Islamist activists – including certain preachers – are inciting local youth to pursue jihad in Syria. This is achieved by inculcating in young people a feeling of religious duty to contribute to the ‘resistance’ as represented by VEOs. Intrinsic to this narrative is the idea that those who have not yet realized this ‘duty’ are subject to shame. This enables violent extremist activists to propose VEO recruitment as a form of redemption and as means to avenging beleaguered Sunni ‘brothers’ in Syria. The potential resonance of such radicalization tactics is relatively high in Ajloun. This was indicated by the fact that a considerable 35 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed, while 55 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that it is better to die in revenge than live on in shame (see Figure 61). One area in which local Salafist Jihadists are advocating for a Syrian jihad is Anjara.²⁹⁹ However, it is not only local Islamists promoting a Syrian jihad. In fact, one of the most influential Salafist Jihadists in this respect is the Saudi sheikh, Mohammed Al Arefe,³⁰⁰ who has visited Jordan on several occasions to deliver public lectures. Such is his influence that, following one of these occasions – a May 2014 lecture at the University of Jordan (Amman) – a local girl from the village of Wahdanah (Ajloun district) converted from Christianity to Islam, purportedly persuaded by Al Arefe’s rhetoric.³⁰¹ Significantly, as embodied by Al Arefe, violent extremists and VEO representatives advocating for jihad tend to be legitimate or self-identified religious figures. This enables them to convincingly bolster their campaigns with religious text, reminding readers and listeners of a widely accepted religious duty to perform jihad.³⁰² Testament to the success of this approach, a considerable 30 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed, while 59 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that violent jihad in Syria is justifiable. Meanwhile, a notable 10 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this point (see Figure 62).

“Some sheikhs, when they want to convince the youth that jihad is an obligation, stir a feeling to fight with the terrorist groups because [one’s] religion orders [one] to jihad.”

(Male, 34, Accountant, Ajloun)

²⁹⁹ “The Salafist and Jihadist movement is advising people in our area [Anjara] to go for Jihad.” (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁰⁰ “One of the individuals that has the most effect on [the] Jordanian public is the Islamic preacher, Sheikh Arefe. I blame him [for local VE]. He played a provocative role. He urged and incited youth to go and fight in Syria.” (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁰¹ Aziz, Jean 2014. ‘Islamic extremism on rise in Jordan’, Al Monitor, May 18, 2014.

³⁰² “They [VEOs] always use the Qur’an verses that urge [you] to do jihad since it is an obligation in Islamic religion.” (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Figure 61. To what extent do you agree that it is better to die in revenge than live on in shame?

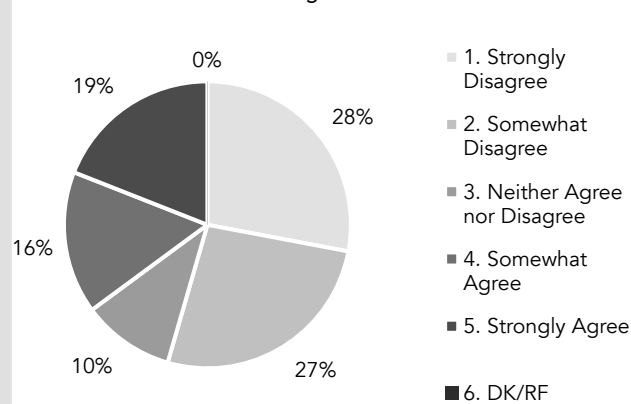
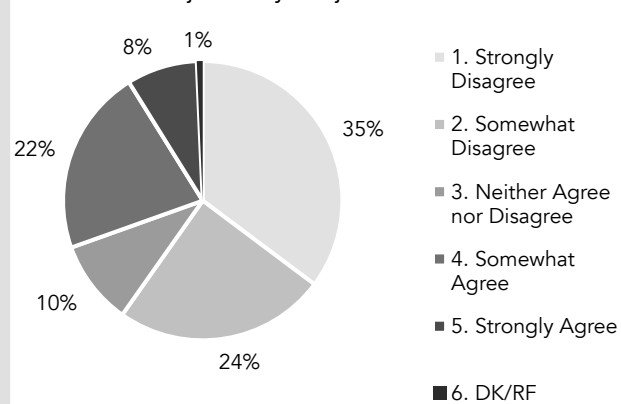


Figure 62. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Syria is justifiable?



VEOs present themselves as Islamic resistance movements in order to win support.

By exposing atrocities committed against Muslim civilians and purporting to be acting on behalf of such victims, VEOs are apparently gaining the loyalties of locals. Instrumental to this end, VEOs are circulating recruitment slogans calling for individuals to contribute their efforts in defense of their beleaguered brethren.³⁰³ To strengthen this appeal, VEO campaigners also emphasize the broader religious angle to their ostensible 'resistance' in order to provide their target audience with an Islamic motive. This is reportedly done to great effect. An implicit common belief in the global *Ummah* (Islamic community) across Ajloun facilitates the impact of this message. As does the ability of VEOs to present themselves primarily as Islamic movements, to which many local youths aspire to belong.³⁰⁴ The success of this self-portrayal by VEOs is implicit in the widespread acceptance of a legitimate jihad as a means to liberating 'Islamic land'.³⁰⁵ For example, 46 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 41 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable (see Figure 63). To complement their image as Islamic resistance movements, VEOs have, to a limited extent, been successful in portraying themselves as competent military units. As quantitative findings revealed, a noteworthy 29 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 53 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that members of VEOs are skilled fighters. Significantly, an additional sizeable proportion of locals did not reject this notion: 15 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that members of VEOs are skilled fighters (see Figure 64).

³⁰³ [VEOs use] slogans like, 'Save Muslim women' [and] 'They took Muslim kids'. These slogans make youth sympathize with them and urge youth to leave and join them [VEOs]." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

³⁰⁴ "Youth will join any group calling themselves a Muslim group; they [VEOs] work within the frame of Islamic religion and this is what youth are looking for [...] they could join Al Nusra Front or Daesh." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁰⁵ "They [VEOs] use the religion. Even [average] people think that they [VEOs] are mujahedeen and want to liberate the Muslims' lands and raise the flag of Islam." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

"The religious motive is the most important one. The groups [VEOs] work on convincing the individual that they are joining [them] to defend Islam"

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Figure 63. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable?

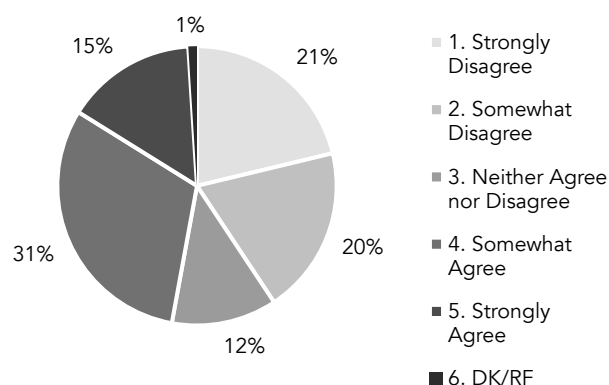
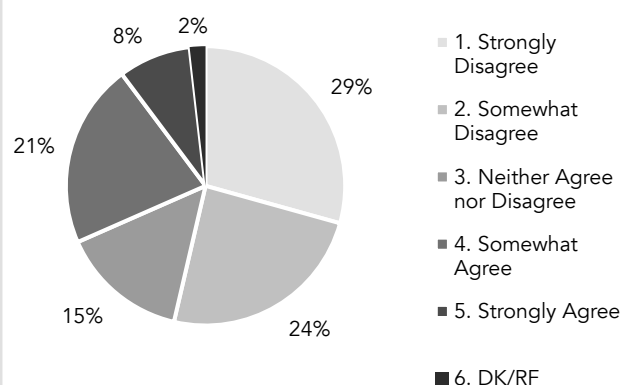


Figure 64. To what extent do you agree that members of VEOs are skilled fighters?



Local Salafist Jihadists and VEOs are attempting to gain support by promoting the idea that the incumbent Jordanian regime is corrupt and un-Islamic.

It is well documented that the Jordanian regime's Western-influenced secularist policies are strongly opposed by much of the population in Jordan. This has been evident in frequent protest movements across the country, such as that against Jordan's conciliatory relationship with Israel (see section 6.1 Perceived Impact of Foreign Relations). Revelations of government corruption cases have also driven locals to demonstrate in public (see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance). According to several respondents, Salafist Jihadists and VEOs persistently attempt to remind people of the government's misconduct and Westernized ideals in an effort to exacerbate tensions between citizens and the state.³⁰⁶ Perhaps the most effective angle to this end is the state's cooperation with Israel, which Salafist Jihadists and VEOs frequently condemn in public.³⁰⁷ Indicative of the warm reception with which such criticism is likely to be met is a widespread objection in Ajloun to the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty (see section 6.1 Perceived Impact of Foreign Relations). Such inflammatory endeavors by Salafist Jihadists are likely to be especially successful among disaffected young men, as respondents explained with reference to Ajloun: a consequence of socio-economic frustrations with the government is a widespread aspiration for an

³⁰⁶ "[Salafist Jihadists] try to tarnish the regime's image by telling the public that it is a corrupted non-Islamic regime." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁰⁷ "Some terrorist groups convince young people by telling them that the Jordanian government works with Israel; they use this. If the government allows for the Israeli embassy to celebrate in Amman, they give the key to extremist groups to attract youth through this." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

Islamist alternative with a supposed Sharia system of jurisprudence to accompany it.³⁰⁸ Indeed, 62 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 28 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Sharia should be the only source of law (see Figure 65). Correspondingly, 66 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 29 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that only Islam can guarantee justice (see Figure 66). Furthermore, Salafist Jihadists, as well as VEOs, are thought to be systematically targeting young men harboring such frustrations against the government as potential recruits.³⁰⁹

"Telling them [people] that the government is corrupted and it won't be able to create jobs for you [drives people toward VE] – using poverty, unemployment and ignorance as reasons to push individuals."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

Figure 65. To what extent do you agree that Sharia should be the only source of law?

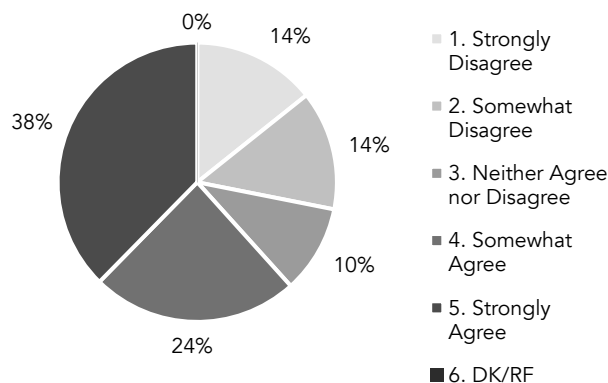
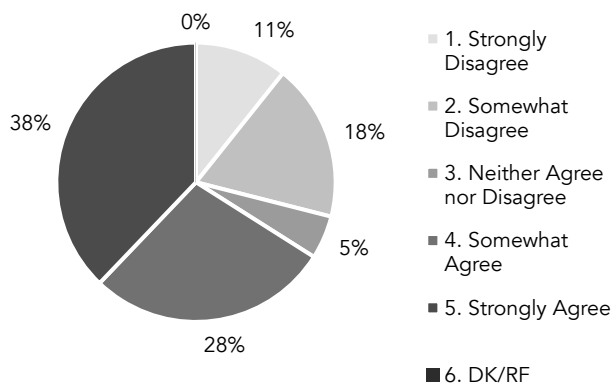


Figure 66. To what extent do you agree that only Islam can guarantee justice?



The Prospect of an impending Islamic caliphate is highly seductive within Ajloun.

Regardless of their attitudes toward VEOs and their broader ideologies, the majority of residents in Ajloun are highly sympathetic to the idea of an Islamic caliphate.³¹⁰ For many, it is conducive to the reinforcement of regional, if not global, Islam. In fact, 49 percent of Ajloun GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 38 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the Caliphate will help restore Islam (see Figure 67).

³⁰⁸ "Motives [driving people toward radicalization] can be social or economical problems. Some of them believe in [the] government's failure, so they want to find a powerful Islamic state that can return their lost rights and spread justice." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³⁰⁹ "[VEOs] target people in need – people who have hatred toward the government – and recruit them." (Male, 50, Retiree, Ajloun)

³¹⁰ "The only message Jordanians sympathize with is the establishment of the Islamic State." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

This in turn offers and avenue of appeal for all of the VEOs in question, as the establishment of an Islamic caliphate is a central component of their stated agendas. For example, there were suggestions that, though they are not enthusiastic about the organization, elements of the local population condone ISIS on the grounds that its pursuit of a caliphate is consistent with Islamic principles.³¹¹ Indeed, according to several respondents, the establishment of an Islamic caliphate is the single most powerful motivation for prospective VEO loyalists.³¹² No doubt aware of the popular appeal that an Islamic caliphate has among locals, VEOs are known to be promulgating the idea profusely as a major tool in their propaganda arsenal. For added substance, they are drawing on historical Islamic figureheads such as the eighth century fifth Abbasid caliph, Haroun Al Rashid, thereby attempting to invoke a sense of cultural nostalgia and amplifying the emotional impact of the narrative.³¹³

"Most of the areas in Ajloun accept the ideology of ISIS. They believe that ISIS's ideology is right when ISIS established an Islamic state. The areas of Kufranjah and Ayn Janna accept the ideology of ISIS."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

By perpetuating their own religious interpretations, VEOs have successfully generated doubts as to the meaning of 'true Islam'.

In attempting to justify their actions and provide themselves with ideological legitimacy, VEOs have made use of prominent Islamic texts and scholars. According to respondents, extremist religious messaging of such sort, whether delivered by VEOs or religious groups, persistently targets youth.³¹⁴ ISIS provides one example: by claiming to be acting according to the prescriptions of the eminent scholar, Sheikh Taqi Ibn Taymiyyah, ISIS maintains that it is justified in waging violent jihad against "apostates."³¹⁵ Indeed, the organization frequently includes quotes by the scholar in its main publication, *Dabiq*.³¹⁶ A consequence of this has been that swaths of the Muslim community who had hitherto appreciated such scholars as Ibn Taymiyyah have found themselves uncomfortably close to VEO foundations. As a result, the interpretations of scholarly Islamic texts and the author's legitimacy have been thrown into question. In Jordan, for example, Muslims have long read and admired the works of Ibn Taymiyyah. Yet, following the rise of ISIS and its self-identification with the principles of Ibn Taymiyyah, the government has taken

³¹¹ "They don't support ISIS, but there is a sort of acceptance for their ideas. Some people accept the ideology of ISIS as an Islamic State thinking that it represents the right religious beliefs." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³¹² "The announcement of establishing an Islamic state and Islamic Caliphate. The main message [for generating sympathies with JN and ISIS] is establishing a strong Islamic state." (Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³¹³ "They [VEOs] use speeches that make people sympathize with them, such as saying that they will build a state of Khilafa and a state of Islam, and that their state will be like Haroun Al Rashid's." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

³¹⁴ "Religious groups keep sending religious messages to youth in order to plant and reinforce extreme ideas in youths' minds." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

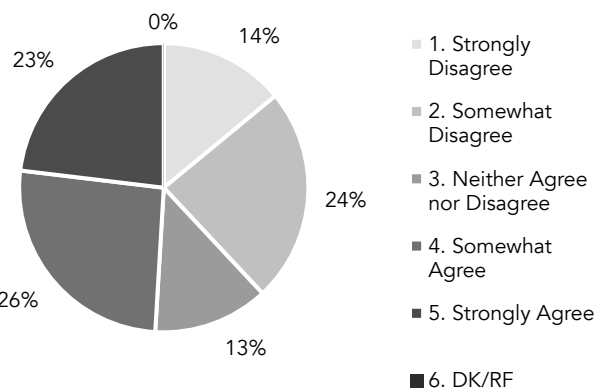
³¹⁵ Khilkhal, Shukur 2014, 'IS emerges from radical jurisprudence', Al Monitor, August 12 2014.

³¹⁶ Tariq, Khwaja Khusro 2016. 'Lessons from Islamic history: Ibn Taymiyyah and the synthesis of Takfir', The Huffington Post, May 5, 2016.

measures intended to ban the latter's books from the country – notably since ISIS included a quote by the scholar in its video of the murder of Moath Al Kasasbeh.³¹⁷

Respondents reflected the renewed uncertainty as to what constitutes 'true Islam', calling for scholastic measures to effectively refute the religious claims of VEOs. One such past initiative is the Amman Message. In November 2004, King Abdullah II endorsed the Amman Message, which was delivered in a sermon by Chief Justice Sheikh Izz Al-Din Al Tamimi. The statement was an attempt to define and reemphasize the values of moderate Islam, and to distance it from more 'extreme' interpretations, such as those that justify the practice of Takfir.³¹⁸ Indeed, one respondent celebrated the impact of the Amman Message, citing it as a crucial step toward increasing religious tolerance, encouraging clemency and discarding Islamic extremism.³¹⁹

Figure 67. To what extent do you agree that the Caliphate will help restore Islam?



"The scholars of Muslim countries should issue a book or a message to remove doubts and suspicions about the Islamic religion. For instance, there is no such thing as sexual jihad. Also the case of jihad: what is it? When do the conditions call for jihad and who calls for it? Defending the honour and dignity has now become too distorted. Who says a child can carry a weapon?"

(Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

Although local preachers are beginning to denounce VE and undermine VEOs, their efforts are found wanting.

Respondents explained that local religious leaders have started addressing issues of VE with renewed vigor, perhaps in response to the government's reassertion of the need for imams to contribute to CVE efforts (see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance). This was with specific reference to Anjara (Ajloun district), where mosque imams have publicly attempted to counter ISIS' religious messaging, depicting

³¹⁷ The New Arab 2015. 'Jordan under pressure to ban Ibn Taymiyyah's books', The New Arab, June 10, 2015.

³¹⁸ International Crisis Group 2005. 'Jordan's 9/11: dealing with jihadi Islamism', ICG, Middle East Report 47, November 23, 2005.

³¹⁹ "In Jordan, one of the most major ways to fight religious extremism is the message of Amman. When the Mufti of the kingdom spoke to the people, he said that the Da'wa [promotion of Islam] is only done by good deeds and by advice, and by helping people to stay away from violence, and by accepting others and [exercising] forgiveness. Amman's message came out to the whole world as a message of moderate Islam, to change the image of Islam from a terrorist extremist religion." (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

the organization instead as unrepresentative of Islam.³²⁰ Outside of Anjara, one Imam in particular was singled out for his contributions to these efforts: Sheikh Hassan Al Faqir of Sa'ad Bin Abbi Waqqas Mosque in Al Hashemiyyah (Ajloun district). Indeed, a number of mosques across the governorate are notable for their stance against extremism, as well as their large capacity: Salah Al Din Mosque, located in Ajloun City; Abu Baker Al Seddiq Mosque, located in the Wadi Al Tawaheen area (Kufranjah district); Al Rashidin Mosque, located in Ayn Al Bustan (Kufranjah district); Omar Ibn Al Khattab Mosque, located in the center of Kufranjah district, close to Kufranjah Circle; and Ayn Al Bustan Mosque, also located in the center of Ayn Al Bustan (Kufranjah district). However, one respondent explained that many of these initiatives are failing to have an impact, and bemoaned the inadequacy or indeed absence of CVE initiatives by local imams. One major impediment to the delivery of such initiatives according to respondents is the fact that some local imams are objectionable characters who intimidate local youth rather than appealing to them as role models.³²¹

"We blame the sheikhs since they are supposed to increase people's awareness and teach them more about extremism groups. The Imam's Fridays' speeches are not doing anything. Sheikhs are supposed to gather youth and clarify the ideologies of ISIS and other groups in order to prove [to] them [youth] that these ideologies have nothing to do with Islam."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

There is a shortage of influential moderate role models, and of those who do exist, most are not local and their religious orientation is questionable.

There are a number of national public figures whom respondents identified as representative of correct Islam. This includes the government spokesperson, Moath Al Momani, the Military Mufti (authority on Islamic law with the prerogative to issue *fatwas*); the Egyptian activist and TV preacher, Amr Khaled; the Egyptian professor and Islamic theologian, Omar Abd Al Kafi; the university professor and Islamic preacher, Amjad Qourshah; and the politician, Dr. Mohammad Nouh Al Qudah, who originally hails from Ayn Janna (Ajloun district). Although widely admired, some of these figures promote very controversial religious interpretations and political views. Most glaringly, Amjad Qourshah was arrested in June 2016 for publicly condemning the government's role in the US-led coalition against ISIS.³²² He is also alleged to have encouraged his students and others to join JN in combatting the Syrian regime.³²³ Furthermore, there are suggestions that he has promoted religious intolerance, reportedly having publicly discouraged

³²⁰ "We started seeing preachers talking about Islam and jihad and many other things – like ISIS didn't do this or ISIS doesn't represent Islam." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

³²¹ "When the mosque's imam is a good person who talks to people – especially youth – in a nice way and uses the invitation method with them instead of the intimidation method, then he definitely would make them stay away from extremism and show them that extremism has nothing to do with Islam." (Female, 27 Unemployed, Ajloun)

³²² Azzeh, Laila 2016. 'Muslim scholar detained 'over comments on Jordan's role in anti-Daesh war', The Jordan Times, June 15, 2016.

³²³ Albawaba News 2016. 'Jordanian authorities arrest controversial Islamic preacher Amjad Qourshah', Albawaba News, June 14, 2016.

Muslims from actively respecting Christian traditions such as Christmas.³²⁴ Indeed, even among Ajloun's residents, Qourshah is a controversial figure. According to one respondent, for instance, he has used his university lessons as an opportunity to advocate for ISIS.³²⁵ Al Qudah's religious moderation is also questionable. For example, one local admired his capacity to provide well-founded arguments to support a particular definition of jihad, making distinctions as to what constitutes a legitimate target. To some however, his conclusions – or at least the way in which they are interpreted – may appear extreme, as they promote violence nonetheless. For example, one respondent commended what he understood to be Al Qudah's contention that those bearing weapons deserve to be killed.³²⁶ Nonetheless, he commands high respect, not least for his direct confrontation of issues relating to VE. One platform from which he does so is the Al Yaqeen Channel, on which he hosts a religious program. Aside from national role models, there is little to satisfy the need for moderate locally based individuals with the capacity to influence youth. As a consequence, one respondent claimed that there exist no potential candidates to front effective CVE initiatives in the governorate. Reportedly, this is predominantly due to a lack of determination.³²⁷

"Amjad Qourshah has a program on TV and all [the] people like and follow him. Here, half of the people like him so he should give lectures to face extremism. In addition to Mohammed Nouh Al Qudah – all people like him and his method pushes you to love the religion."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Ajloun)

There are numerous successful local CVE campaigns but they are deemed too few in number.

Respondents mentioned numerous initiatives aimed at raising awareness of VE, countering the ideologies of VEOs, as well as tackling the underlying drivers of radicalization and VEO recruitment. For example, the AJYC is well recognized by locals, and has conducted several discussion groups and lectures focused on undermining extremism and promoting tolerance. One such event took place in April 2015, when the Islamic scholar from Rasoun (Orjan district), Sheikh Nour Al Din Al Khateb, delivered a lecture about the role of youth in CVE. Bilal Al Samadi, a youth leader from Ayn Janna, has conducted similar events for the organization. The AJYC has also implemented a program focused on generating inter-faith dialogue and undermining extremism via social media.³²⁸ Similarly, the local CMCD has conducted regular life skills training programs, reaching approximately 1,000 residents. These programs entail training on inter-cultural dialogue, cultural tolerance, emotional management, and problem solving, and they encourage

³²⁴ Bulos, Nabih 2016. 'Jordan scholar falls from government grace after criticizing role in fight against Islamic State', Los Angeles Times, July 5, 2016.

³²⁵ "Amjad Qourshah, who is currently arrested, had lectures where he supported ISIS, and according to what I heard he is charged for promoting terrorist ideas." (Male, 30, IT Technician, Ajloun)

³²⁶ "Sheikh Mohammad Noah Al Qudah is a person who has knowledge about Islam. He can clarify the meaning of jihad and support his argument with evidence based on what Islam said about jihad. He said that any person who has a weapon should be killed while innocents shouldn't. He was clarifying controversial religious terms." (Male, 30, Database Administrator, Ajloun)

³²⁷ "There's no one [who could lead the fight against VE] because whoever is in charge is only doing it because it's his job and because he's getting paid to do it, and not because they believe in it." (Male, 45, Journalist, Ajloun)

³²⁸ "There should be a clear message, like the one used by AJYC in its program, 'The Messengers of Moderation in Social Media', which is quite significant." (Male, 35, Youth Group Coordinator, Ajloun)

participants to become politically and socially engaged. A third example is the Al Wasatiyah Forum,³²⁹ which brings together tribal leaders, male and female community leaders, businessmen and businesswomen from across Jordan to promote moderate Islam through yearly conferences. A fourth example is Sayyedat Ajloun (The Ajloun Women's Association), located in Ayn Janna's Allo'luah complex. Respondents recognized the organization's indirect contributions to CVE through its efforts to build the capacity of local young citizens. For example, the organization provides financial grants to students unable to afford university education. It also helps women to establish micro-businesses in areas such as tailoring, food processing and cosmetics, and encourages political participation. Prominent members of the organization include Ola Qudah, Samirah Qudah and the Christian former teacher and school principal, Salma Al Rabadi. According to respondents, testament to the success of these programs is their ability to de-radicalize local individuals, some of whom after attending sessions at the CMCD have renounced their support for VEOs like ISIS and JN. That said, though they applauded these initiatives, respondents lamented that there are not more, suggesting that Ajloun's remote geographical location restricts access for many organizations.

"The problem is the geographical location of Ajloun; these organizations couldn't reach youth in Ajloun City, so they need some help because they are playing an important role and the public needs such activities."

(Male, 45, Construction Contractor, Ajloun)

³²⁹ Wasatiyah Forum, accessed: October 21, 2016. Available at: < <http://www.wasatyeha.net/?q=ar> >