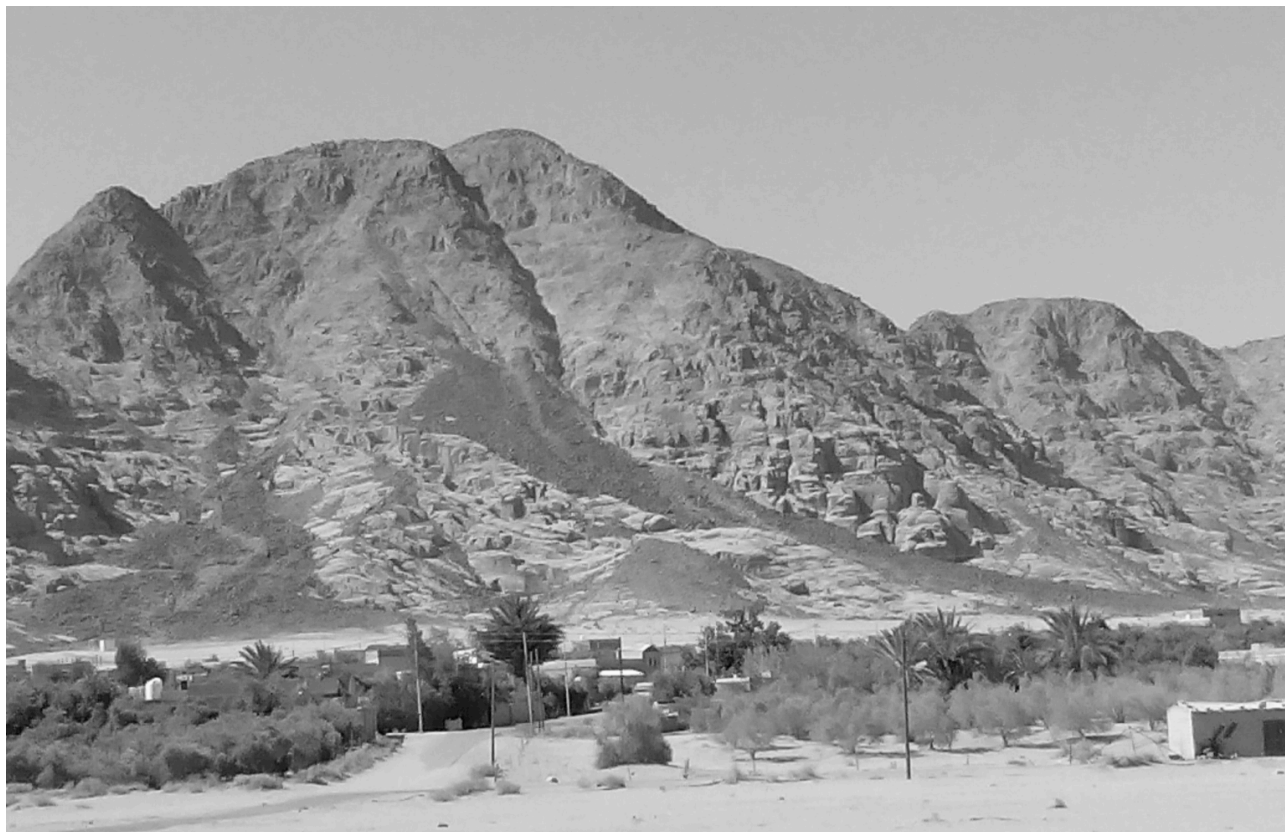


Drivers And Barriers Impacting Propensity Toward Violent Extremism

AQABA: TARGET LOCATION ANALYSIS



Almashare' Alfar'iah Area, Aqaba governorate.

November 2016

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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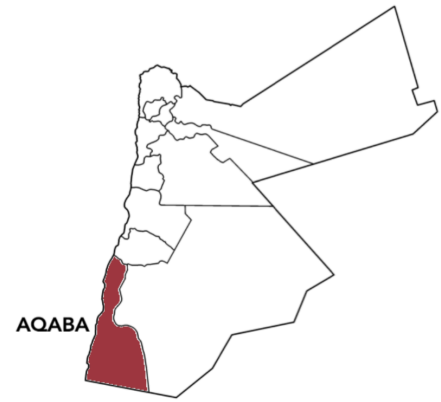
List of Acronyms

ASEZA:	Aqaba Separate Economic Zone Authority
AQ:	Al Qa'ida
DK:	'Don't Know' (GQ Answers)
FSA:	Free Syrian Army
EU:	European Union
GID:	General Intelligence Directorate (Jordan)
GQ:	Guided Questionnaire
IAF:	Islamic Action Front
IDF:	Israel Defense Forces
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
ISIS:	Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham
JAF:	Jordanian Armed Forces
JD:	Jordanian Dinar
JN:	Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) ¹
KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MB:	Muslim Brotherhood
MP:	Member of Parliament
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
RF:	'Refuse to Answer' (GQ Answers)
UK:	United Kingdom
USD:	US Dollar
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

As Jordan's only coastal region, Aqaba is geographically exceptional among the country's governorates. Its principal industry and leading employer is tourism, which ensures that the governorate's local economy is centered on its main urban area – the seaside resort town of Aqaba. Aqaba is home to a string of local branches of prominent multinational hotel chains including Kempinsky, Hilton, Intercontinental and Mövenpick, which attract domestic, regional and international tourists, albeit fewer than in the years before the Syrian conflict and the Arab Spring. The city also draws workers from across Jordan who live alongside the local population, as well as expatriate workers from countries including Egypt and Syria. In contrast to Aqaba's urban center, the villages in the governorate's interior are less prosperous. Here, locals rely mainly on agriculture, and villages in Al Quweira and Wadi Araba suffer from high rates of unemployment and limited investment.



Despite its concentration of tourists, offering a potential target for terrorists, Aqaba has never suffered an attack beyond being mistakenly struck by rockets fired from the Sinai towards the neighboring Israeli town of Eilat, most recently in August 2010. Traffic into and out of Aqaba governorate from the rest of Jordan is monitored at checkpoints on the main road that passes through the Wadi Araba valley, making it difficult for potential terrorists to enter Aqaba City undetected or without being searched. The close-knit nature of the communities across the governorate also means that locals are quick to identify outsiders. This minimizes the potential for strangers to escape notice when exhibiting suspicious behavior.

The vast majority of respondents did not consider violent extremism a significant problem in Aqaba, and there are very few instances where locals have joined violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in Syria or Iraq. However, others have travelled as far as Turkey only to turn back instead of entering Syria. One of the few known individuals from Aqaba to have successfully joined a VEO became a member of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham (ISIS) in Syria. However, this caused his friends and family to disown him, reflecting the strong negative perceptions of VEOs and foreign fighters among locals. While respondents were concerned that some religious extremism exists in Aqaba, the vast majority of locals are thought to be observant, but not radical, Muslims. Indeed, most reject the concept of *Takfir* and the idea that Muslims should avoid interaction with non-Muslims. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority believed that freedom of religion is important, and was complimentary about the small local Christian community. Furthermore, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has been actively engaged in promoting moderate Islam in Aqaba and was widely praised for running workshops and seminars for local clerics and preachers. These events have focused on preventing the dissemination of violent extremist (VE) messages in government-regulated mosques within the governorate.

Of the prominent Jordanian religious and political organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is the most well-known in Aqaba. Here, it has a considerable presence through its network of Qur'an centers and prayer groups in mosques, which allows it to retain and expand its membership. Salafist groups of both the Jihadist and Quietist stands have fewer members than the MB in Aqaba. Furthermore, they were

often described by respondents in less hostile terms than the MB, which attracted some criticism for its perceived anti-establishment position. Nevertheless, both the MB and Salafists were often seen as gateways to VE and/or VEO membership on the grounds that they encourage their members to become more religiously conservative. Some also argued that Salafists and the MB actively promote the concept of jihad, which may prompt members or followers to mistakenly conclude that the conditions for combative jihad are met in Syria or Iraq. Meanwhile, as an illegal organization, Hizb ut-Tahrir was largely unknown to respondents who considered it a fringe religious political group in Aqaba.

While youth unemployment and inactivity were acknowledged as leading issues in Aqaba, respondents also observed that the governorate is home to at least seven youth clubs and branches of national youth organizations. These provide a focal point for youths – particularly the Princess Basma Community Center and the Noor Al Hussein Foundation – and were seen as a significant barrier to the development of VE in the governorate. Respondents asserted that such organizations provide a constructive social environment that reduces the possibility of youths becoming marginalized and frustrated and hence vulnerable to VEO narratives that promote empowerment and financial gain. There is also a strong culture of youth social activism in Aqaba, with youth clubs across the governorate organizing frequent events in Aqaba City and the surrounding villages. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Education often support these events. Furthermore, local activities are occasionally carried out in concert with the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and security services, fostering social exchanges and personal relationships among community members – especially between those vulnerable to VE messaging and those whose job it is to counter VEO activity.

"Aqaba's situation is not like the situation in other Jordanian cities as violent extremism is not a problem here. Aqaba City's location, in addition to the strong local culture and values of the youth in Aqaba, and the hard work done by the government and non-governmental agencies to prevent terrorism becoming an issue are the reasons for this."

(Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

2.0 ISLAMIST AND VEO SUPPORT

2.1 SUPPORT FOR VEOs

There is strong opposition to VEOs and few locals are known to have traveled to Syria to fight.

VEOs are not considered much of a security threat in Aqaba due to their perceived remoteness,¹ nor do they enjoy significant levels of support in the governorate.² In fact, the vast majority of respondents expressed strong opposition to the principal VEOs identified, notably Al Qa'ida (AQ), ISIS and Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) (JN). All three were generally perceived as 'extremist groups' and commonly associated with ill-advised jihad in Syria and Iraq and, particularly in the case of ISIS, the misguided establishment of a Caliphate. VEOs, especially ISIS, were also criticized for the perceived brutality of their behavior – notably the mistreatment of civilians in territories under their control and the killing of Sunni Muslims. Inter-VEO fighting was also met with wide disapproval – mainly conflict between JN and ISIS in Syria. This was seen as evidence that self-interest is being prioritized over a stated mission to defeat the Assad regime and protect Syrian civilians. Though some speculated that there may be VEO sleeper cells in Aqaba, the general view was that there are few, if any, active VEO members in the governorate and that while a handful of locals may openly express pro-VEO views, they are a tiny minority.³ Furthermore, research indicated that very few locals are known to have travelled to Syria to fight: of those identified by respondents, one joined ISIS in Syria, one joined JN and a third became a member of Jaysh Al Islam, a local Syrian armed group.⁴ This suggests that Aqaba has contributed far fewer VEO or armed group members than other governorates in the country based on estimates that some 1,500 to 2,000 Jordanian nationals have fought or continue to fight in Syria since the beginning of the conflict there.⁵

Overall, locals are more likely to endorse JN than ISIS, though quantitative findings revealed that only 10 percent of respondents believed there is 'strong' or 'some' support for JN in their community. This equals the 10 percent who saw support for AQ, and far surpasses the four percent support for ISIS (see Figure 1). The very low level of support for ISIS was widely attributed to the January 2015 immolation of Jordanian Air Force Pilot Moath Al Kasasbeh, which was a major turning point in attitudes toward the organization.⁶ Prior to Kasasbeh's televised execution, some locals held positive or neutral views of ISIS, which was then

¹ "Religious leaders and organizations in Aqaba are not promoting terrorism. My friend is an Imam and he talks in mosques about terrorism and he is against them. I have never heard of anyone who worked to promote terrorism in Jordan." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

² "We don't feel the effect of ISIS or Al Nusra [JN] here in Aqaba." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

³ "Violent extremism is not a very serious problem. I haven't heard of specific cases of violent extremist groups present in Aqaba, and if some left to join in Syria, I have no clue about their affiliations there." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

⁴ Hassan, Hassan 2013. 'The Army of Islam is winning in Syria', Foreign Policy, October 01, 2013.

⁵ Based on the 2015 census conducted by the Jordan Department of Statistics, Aqaba governorate would be expected to contribute 1.97 percent of the total number of VEO participants, which would translate into between 30 and 39 based on estimates ranging from 1,500 to 2,000 participants in total.

⁶ "Before the incident, some Jordanians supported ISIS and believed that they were the right image and form of Islam. The murder of Moath proved to us the brutality of ISIS and made all Jordanians believe that ISIS fighters are terrorists. The story of Moath united all Jordanians and made them believe even more in their leaders." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

identified as one of the most successful 'revolutionary' groups fighting the Assad regime in Syria. Some would even air their support for the VEO openly. To most locals however, the killing of Moath Al Kasasbeh marked a watershed moment bringing to the fore the opacity surrounding ISIS's objectives, as well as the brutality of its methods in the conflict. This turned public opinion firmly against the VEO. ISIS has retained some residual support in Aqaba, though most limit their support to statements in favor of the VEO.⁷ Several respondents also endorsed ISIS for reasons including its observance of Sharia law, its opposition to the Assad regime and its perceived military strength.⁸ They also offered examples of pro-ISIS behavior in Aqaba, such as an instance whereby an ISIS flag was reportedly drawn on the wall of a mosque in Aqaba City in early 2016, only to be quickly removed.⁹ Yet despite such incidents, the level of support for ISIS in Aqaba should not be overstated, and it is clear that general endorsement for the VEO's actions and/or ideology rarely appear to translate into active membership of ISIS in Syria or Iraq.

"I personally know a person from Aqaba who joined an extremist group. He was an employee at the Ministry of Education and we suddenly heard that he traveled to Syria. According to what he said, he went to Syria to do jihad. Right now he is with Jaysh Al Islam. I connect with him on Facebook every once in a while. This is the first person I know who did this."

(Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

AQ is largely seen as obsolete, though Osama Bin Laden is still held in regard by some.

AQ receives limited support in Aqaba, and many respondents described the VEO as inactive in the region and even defunct.¹⁰ However, former leader Osama Bin Laden did attract some praise for forgoing a life of luxury to fight jihad,¹¹ and for standing up to Russia and the US in the past. Nonetheless, the general impression of AQ was of a formerly significant group that laid the ideological groundwork for JN and ISIS to emerge following the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011.¹² As a result, AQ was often strongly equated with JN, and sometimes ISIS, and as the perceived ideological forebear of these VEOs it was

⁷ "I know an employee in a five star hotel in Aqaba who serves alcohol, and who is still a supporter of ISIS. He supports them in everything but he doesn't play an active role, he just talks about them and that's it." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁸ "When you see what ISIS have on TV you feel they have unbelievable support and power." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

⁹ "Seven months ago they found the [ISIS] black flag painted in a mosque in Aqaba City. I don't know who drew it but some people did and everyone was surprised. They cleaned it off the wall the same day that they found it." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

¹⁰ "I don't think Al Qa'ida really exists any more. People see it as something that has ended and left nothing. I mean, their remnants are currently in Yemen but in Iraq there are more members of ISIS than Al Qa'ida judging from the media we listen to. As for Syria, I don't think Al Qa'ida exists there." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹¹ "I look at Zarqawi and Bin Laden and I consider them heroes and jihadists, and I don't see them as terrorists like they used to describe them. For example, Bin Laden was a billionaire and he could have lived an amazing life full of luxuries, but he left everything and went to jihad. (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

¹² "My friend said that the group he was with were fighting against the Syrian regime. He was with Jabhat Al Nusra, because it is the legitimate descendant of Al Qa'ida and that's why he chose it and not ISIS." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

also blamed for some of their behavior, including the execution of Moath Al Kasasbeh.¹³ Some respondents observed that people no longer talk about AQ, mainly since the death of Bin Laden, while JN and ISIS have come to the forefront of the conflict in Syria.¹⁴ Others even expressed doubts that AQ continues to exist in any meaningful sense outside of isolated pockets in Yemen and Afghanistan. The vast majority of respondents, 68 percent, reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to AQ in their community, while only 10 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for the VEO (see Figure 1). Notably, 10 percent of Aqaba Guided Questionnaire (GQ) respondents also stated that they had not heard of the VEO at all, corroborating the view of the organization expressed by respondents who thought that AQ has limited relevance to, or support from, locals in Aqaba governorate.

"I don't think Al Qa'ida really exists any more, people see it as something that has ended and left nothing. I mean their remnants are currently in Yemen but in Iraq there are more members of ISIS than Al Qa'ida judging from the media we listen to. As for Syria I don't think Al Qa'ida exists there."

(Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

JN is more popular than ISIS in Aqaba, but still lacks a meaningful support base.

JN receives more support than ISIS in Aqaba, though the vast majority of respondents still viewed it negatively, considering it a terrorist group. This is despite the fact that JN was not deemed a threat to Jordan's national security, unlike ISIS.¹⁵ Furthermore, respondents sometimes struggled to distinguish between JN and ISIS, and even AQ,¹⁶ seeing them as part of a single organization. This suggests that JN's popularity has suffered by association from ISIS's uncompromising version of Salafist Jihadism and brutal methodology, including the murder of Kasasbeh.¹⁷ In fact, the vast majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 72 percent, believed that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to JN in their community, whereas only 10 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support. Furthermore, 15 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents thought people in their community are 'neutral' towards JN (see Figure 1).¹⁸ Where JN was seen as distinct from ISIS, it often emerged positively due to its perceived eschewal of the brutal and violent behavior exhibited by ISIS, which frequently releases videos of gruesome executions of civilians.¹⁹ JN also received praise for supposedly prioritizing the alleviation of Sunni Muslim suffering –

¹³ "ISIS wasn't always categorized as a terrorist group in Jordan until the incident of the martyr Moath Al Kasasbeh." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

¹⁴ "We now only hear of ISIS and Al Nusra. Before we used to hear about Bin Laden and Al Qa'ida but now he is gone and we only hear about ISIS and Al Nusra." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁵ "I don't have any information on Al-Nusra. I never saw them threatening this country internally. I mean they work within the limits of their own country and they don't have any expansionist dreams or harm other countries. I never heard of someone from them bombing in Jordan" (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁶ "ISIS, Al Nusra and Al Qa'ida; they are the same. Nusra is descended from Al Qa'ida. Some ISIS members are also from Al Qa'ida." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁷ "In my society, they do not differentiate between ISIS and Al Nusra, they consider them both Islamic and jihadist and call for a Caliphate. They consider them all one group, one army." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹⁸ "Al Nusra, are they in the right or are they in the wrong? I don't know." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁹ AFP, 2016. 'ISIS executes 24 after seizing Syrian village', Al Arabiya English, June 29, 2016.

apparent in its combat against the Assad regime – rather than attempting to build its own state as ISIS has done in Syria and Iraq. On this basis, some respondents even questioned whether JN could be considered a VEO at all as its stated goal is to protect the Syrian population from the depredations of Syrian regime forces.²⁰ However, fighting between JN and ISIS has harmed the former's reputation, as it has undermined the argument that its primary objective is to defeat the Assad regime rather than achieving localized dominion.²¹ JN's popularity has also suffered from the persistence of the conflict in Syria: where some respondents stated that there is enthusiasm among locals for joining armed groups against the Syrian regime in the early years of the conflict, many now question whether any of the armed factions in Syria, including JN, are helping to end the fighting or merely prolonging it. The sheer number of armed actors in Syria, and the perceived complexity of the conflict have also dampened locals' enthusiasm for participating in it. This trend has been reinforced by the testimony of individuals who went to Syria to fight, only to return on the grounds that the situation there was too confused and armed groups were fighting one another. Consequently, though JN has some support in Aqaba, its advocates are a small minority. Meanwhile, the majority is hostile towards it, sees it as an extremist group and questions the legitimacy of the group's role in the Syrian conflict.

"ISIS and Al Nusra are descended from Al Qa'ida. They belong to the same group. ISIS considers itself a corrective movement inside Al Qa'ida because they are stricter, but they all call for a Caliphate and jihad, and they also fight against each other. ISIS, Nusra and Al Qa'ida all have an Islamic ideology and want a Caliphate."

(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

ISIS has the highest profile of any VEO in Aqaba but is extremely unpopular.

The vast majority of respondents in Aqaba expressed strong opposition toward ISIS,²² and only a tiny minority of locals is believed to support the VEO.²³ In fact, 93 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to ISIS in their community, while only four percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for the VEO (see Figure 1). Of those respondents who argued in ISIS's defense,²⁴ one individual enthused that if ISIS defeats the Assad regime in Syria it will go on to 'liberate' Palestine from Israeli control. Meanwhile, many acknowledged that ISIS is better known and recognized than other VEOs. This was largely attributed to its prolific media output (a number of respondents made reference to ISIS's online magazine, Dabiq) and the wider media coverage it has attracted for its territorial

²⁰ "Al Nusra represents the people of Syria." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²¹ "Al Nusra and ISIS are in conflict about lands and money, and about who has more followers." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

²² "None of his peers joined ISIS and they hate him for his decision to join. I don't think that they knew that he was planning to join them." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

²³ "You could describe ISIS as something that every Jordanian or any Arab in general is opposed to, because ISIS is against Islam and Muslims." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²⁴ "The Islamic State has everything, the only thing they lack is an international statement that they are an official country. It has passports and its own currency and citizens. Ask people and they will tell you that ISIS is much better than the previous Iraqi regime. They are more comfortable. They live under the Islamic Sharia." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

advances in Iraq and Syria. ISIS has also raised its profile in Aqaba governorate through individual acts of violence,²⁵ particularly the murder of Kasasbeh, and to a lesser extent the killing of Western journalists including James Foley.²⁶ ISIS attracted criticism for fighting with other VEOs and was believed in particular to be in regular combat against JN in Syria. This led some to accuse ISIS, contrary to secular oppositional forces such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), of prioritizing the defeat of other Islamist groups over that of the Syrian regime.²⁷ Notably, and though it was generally considered a distinct organization, several respondents viewed ISIS as part of a broader group of extremist organizations along with AQ and JN on the basis that there is little or no ideological distinction between them. Some even saw ISIS as an amalgamation of groups including Hezbollah, or as a mercenary outfit hired by the Assad regime to kill civilians.²⁸ Others accused the VEO of being an agent of Iran despite its murder of Shias in Iraq, and its anti-Iran and anti-Shia rhetoric.²⁹ Aside from such detractors, whose critiques sometimes indicated a lack of understanding about ISIS's ideology and actions, it is clear that the vast majority of respondents in Aqaba had a basic appreciation of the VEO. While they expressed strong dislike for the group and its methods, it is evident that ISIS represents to them the most prominent and, many believed, the most powerful VEO.³⁰

"I support ISIS because they raise the flag of Allah, and because they put Sharia into practice. In Sharia there is a clear punishment if someone steals or commits adultery. If they do these things then they have to be punished. The intelligence unit called me once because I sympathize with ISIS and they told me that they can prosecute me for sympathizing with them and put me in prison for three years."

(Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁵ "ISIS take part in the killing of families and they burn people alive. They kill these people after making judgments that don't follow Allah's Sharia. If you hold someone captive, then kill them it is against Allah's Sharia." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²⁶ Videos published by ISIS online between 2014 and 2016 depict the execution of Syrian Army, Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi Army prisoners as well as local civilians, journalists and aid workers. Those killed include American citizen James Foley (August 2014), British citizen Alan Henning (October 2014), and Syrian citizen Ruqia Hassan (January 2016).

²⁷ "ISIS and Al Nusra fight each other in some areas and are allies in others to fight the Syrian Army, but ISIS sees that fighting Al Nusra is a priority over fighting the Syria regime." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

²⁸ "I believe that ISIS is a hybrid of more than a million Muslim sect or religious sects. They are mixture of groups including Hezbollah and Al Nusra; it's a hybrid and it is also possible that they are hired killers." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²⁹ "ISIS claim they are Sunnis but they are not. I have information that Iran is the one who supports these groups and an example is that nothing happened in Iran." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

³⁰ "Look at the great expansion of ISIS, is it possible that all the countries of NATO are not able to defeat it?" (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

Hezbollah is widely criticized for its involvement in Syria but retains some support due to its historical armed opposition to Israel.

Hezbollah retained rather significant levels of support in Aqaba despite the group's involvement in the Syrian conflict alongside the Assad regime, which many respondents strongly criticized. 58 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Hezbollah in their community, while a significant minority of 26 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support (see Figure 1). Opposition to the organization can be attributed to the prominent military role Hezbollah's Shia Muslim fighters have played in the Syrian conflict, including notable victories for Syrian regime forces such as the recapture of the town of Qusair in June 2013.³¹ This has angered locals in Aqaba, who are largely Sunni. Hezbollah's ties to Iran, as well as to the Alawite-led Assad regime in Syria, were also linked by some respondents to a broader narrative of Shia expansion in the region and the repression of Sunnis.³² Several respondents also felt that the Syrian conflict has drawn Hezbollah's focus away from spearheading military resistance against Israel. Residual support for Hezbollah in Aqaba is largely linked to the group's support for Palestinians in their fight against Israel, and its notable successes in fighting the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Two such examples are the 2006 conflict and, prior to that, the guerilla campaign that eventually led to Israel withdrawing its forces from South Lebanon in 2000.³³ Given that Hezbollah has been militarily engaged in Syria since 2012 but still retains some support in Aqaba, it is likely that it will continue to enjoy similar or greater levels of support in the future depending on whether it enters into further conflicts with Israel.

"Hezbollah were loved for a long time because they fought the Jews in South Lebanon and now it turns out that they are the reason for all the mess in Syria. We thought they were heroes because we support the Palestinians and we were happy Hezbollah were fighting the Jews but apparently we were tricked. I used to love and support them but now I don't anymore."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

Hamas is widely seen as a resistance faction rather than a VEO, and is supported by the majority of respondents in Aqaba.

Hamas enjoyed support from the majority of respondents in Aqaba, which is closely linked to antipathy toward neighboring Israel and sympathy for Palestinians among locals. Respondents frequently described Hamas as a resistance group and actively distinguished it from VEOs including JN,³⁴ ISIS and AQ,³⁵

³¹ Chulov, Martin 2013. 'Syrian town of Qusair falls to Hezbollah in breakthrough for Assad', Guardian, June 05, 2013.

³² "What made me change my mind about Hezbollah is what they did in Syria and how they worked with Iran and how they want to make trouble for Sunnis." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

³³ "Hezbollah fought in Lebanon and managed to get the Jews out of the South, and at that time the Salafists and Wahhabis were doing nothing in Saudi." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

³⁴ "Hamas is different. They have never committed a terrorist attack. They know their enemy is Israel and they fight it. But as for Al Nusra and ISIS and Bin Laden [AQ], they used to attack civilians. Hamas is not a terrorist group." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

³⁵ "I don't consider Hamas the same as JN or AQ or ISIS, and I think that comparing terrorists with Hamas is wrong." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

stressing that it is involved in a legitimate struggle to recover Palestinian land from Israeli occupation.³⁶ Some did acknowledge that Hamas shares common ground with VEOs in that it is not a secular group but was founded as an explicitly Islamist resistance movement.³⁷ Yet these respondents stated that while they did not always agree with Hamas's actions,³⁸ especially in Gaza, they admired its general opposition to Israel. 56 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents believed that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Hamas in their community, while only 23 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition (see Figure 1). Thus, although the majority of respondents depicted Hamas in a positive light, a minority was critical of the organization. The latter condemned the group for its heavy-handed rule in Gaza, accusing it of murdering innocent Palestinians who opposed it.³⁹ Others stated that they had lost respect for Hamas since it turned against the Assad regime in Syria, which has supposedly supported Hamas and hosted its leadership, including Khaled Meshaal, for many years. This view did not necessarily reflect support for the Assad regime. It was rather a criticism of the manner in which Hamas turned on its host in Syria having previously endorsed it and benefited from its protection. This leaves it open to accusations of ungratefulness and political expediency. A significant minority of GQ respondents, 20 percent, thought people in their community are neutral toward Hamas (see Figure 1), and this can be partially explained by the competition between Hamas and rival Palestinian faction Fatah. The two parties have had a fractious relationship in the Palestinian territories that has included the ejection of Fatah from Gaza following military clashes in June 2007.⁴⁰ As such, while some of these locals may be supportive of Palestinians in general, a preference for Fatah would limit their enthusiasm for Hamas.⁴¹ However, in general, Hamas attracts sympathy from the majority in Aqaba, as much for its role as a leading Palestinian faction as for its actions in Gaza and the West Bank. It is likely that it will continue to enjoy similar levels of support among locals in future.

"I never saw Hamas wanting to expand outside Palestine. I never saw it being takfiri or assassinating someone from another country or burning them alive, or doing anything like what Daesh is doing."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

³⁶ "Hamas is different. Hamas resists. Hamas fights against occupation. You cannot describe this as extremism." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

³⁷ The name itself, 'Hamas', is an acronym of the Arabic title 'Harakat Al Muqawama Al Islamiyya', which translates as 'The Islamic Resistance Movement'.

³⁸ "I cannot equate Hamas with Jabhat Al Nusra. Hamas fights against the Zionist enemy. It is a resistance movement, even though I don't agree with them on many political issues. Even if they have a religious ideology, Hamas is fighting against the enemy, while other groups don't have a clear enemy." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

³⁹ "Hamas killed and shed Palestinian blood in Gaza. We are asking for revenge. We are an Arab society and when my brother in Gaza gets killed, I won't forgive whoever killed him or her. We heard horrific stories from the people of Gaza about Hamas." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

⁴⁰ BBC, 2013. 'Palestinian Split: Views from Hamas and Fatah six years on', BBC News, June 17, 2013.

⁴¹ "Within the Palestinian community they are divided among Hamas and the PLO [Fatah]." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

Hizb ut-Tahrir is a banned, fringe Islamist party with limited name recognition and a small minority of supporters in Aqaba.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has very limited backing in Aqaba. Only 14 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents think there is 'strong' or 'some' support for the party in their community, compared with the 41 percent who said that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition (see Figure 1). Hizb ut-Tahrir also has the lowest level of name recognition of any VEO or Islamist group. Indeed, 21 percent of respondents said that they have never heard of it, coupled with 24 percent who thought locals held a neutral view of the organization (see Figure 1). Some respondents stated that they were aware that Hizb ut-Tahrir existed in Lebanon, but said they were unaware that it had any presence in Aqaba, or in Jordan as a whole.⁴² Qualitative results also showed that few respondents are familiar with the party or what it represents other than a general association with Islamism. This indicated that Hizb ut-Tahrir would perform poorly in elections in Aqaba were the current ban on its presence in Jordan lifted. However, the latter seems unlikely, as tensions between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the state remain high. For example, the government thwarted the organization's attempt to host a women's conference in 2013 aimed at promoting the establishment of a Caliphate in Syria. Following this, Hizb ut-Tahrir's media office released a statement strongly attacking the Jordanian government and King Abdullah II, thereby making a rapprochement between the central government and Hizb ut-Tahrir even less likely.⁴³ As such, it is probable that Hizb ut-Tahrir will continue to be officially prevented from operating in Jordan as a whole and will be unable to develop a meaningful support base in Aqaba.

"There is no activity in Aqaba linked to Hizb ut-Tahrir, and it is hard to determine whether the party has any members or sympathizers because it is banned, and people are afraid to give their opinion about it."

(Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

Salafist Jihadists are unknown to a significant minority in Aqaba, while those locals who are familiar with the movement are generally hostile toward its members and sympathizers.

Some respondents stated that Salafist Jihadists are present in Aqaba and are thought to worship at a number of mosques in the governorate, though respondents were unable to identify specific locations associated with them. They described Salafist Jihadists as a small, closed community that does not make public statements or otherwise attempt to raise its profile locally. However, despite this low profile, respondents were overwhelmingly hostile towards Salafist Jihadists, and they frequently associated them with VEOs – particularly ISIS and JN. In fact, the family of one man from Aqaba currently in jail for

⁴² "I have heard that Hizb ut-Tahrir are in Lebanon but I have never heard of them in Jordan." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

⁴³ Hizb ut Tahrir, 2013. 'Press release: Jordanian Government bans the women of Hizb ut Tahrir's seminar supporting the women of Syria, proving the Jordanian Regime's partnership with the criminal Assad regime,' HT Central Media Office, April 28, 2013.

attempting to join ISIS in Syria stated that he had been persuaded to do so by local Salafist Jihadists.⁴⁴ Reflecting widespread aversion to the movement, 45 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Salafist Jihadists in their community, while only seven percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support (see Figure 1). Respondents were also frequently either unaware of the presence of Salafist Jihadists or unable to distinguish them from Salafist Quietists. This may account for the 28 percent of GQ respondents who stated that they 'had not heard of them' and the 20 percent who believed people in their community held a neutral view of Salafist Jihadists (see Figure 1). Perceptions of Salafist Jihadists in Aqaba were often linked to negative news stories about the movement elsewhere in Jordan, and several respondents referenced a protest organized by Salafist Jihadists in the city of Zarqa in 2011. This protest became violent and resulted in over 80 members of the police force being injured by protesters, some of whom were armed with swords.⁴⁵ The event contributed to an impression among respondents that Salafist Jihadists represent a threat to Jordan's internal security and stability.⁴⁶ The movement also attracted criticism for its jihadist ideology and desire for the establishment of a Caliphate, which led respondents to assume that Salafist Jihadists are similar to, or the same as, ISIS.⁴⁷ Given the depth of hostility towards them, it is probable that Salafist Jihadists will continue to be viewed with suspicion in Aqaba, and will struggle to expand their existing community.

"Salafists say that they are moderate, but at the end any person who was raised by them will naturally want to go on jihad. They raise people on Islam, the Caliphate and jihad. They raise them to believe that alcohol is haram and that everything that is happening around them is haram."

(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

Locals are largely negative or ambivalent toward the FSA and question its impact in Syria.

The FSA receives only limited support in Aqaba, and the majority of respondents expressed either indifference or negative views toward the group. This was the case despite the FSA being identified as part of the moderate Syrian armed opposition,⁴⁸ and in some cases it was credited with being the first group to take up arms against the Assad regime.⁴⁹ Quantitative findings revealed that 48 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to the FSA in their community, while 25 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support (see Figure 1). Notably, 27 percent of respondents also reported that people in their community held a neutral view of the FSA (see

⁴⁴ "According to what this man's family says, in 2015 the Salafist Jihadist movement in Aqaba convinced him to join ISIS. But someone anonymously reported him, and now he has been arrested for sympathizing with a terrorist group." (Female, 35, Activist, Aqaba)

⁴⁵ Gavlak, Dave 2011. 'Jordan protest: Rise of the Salafist Jihadist movement', BBC News, April 22, 2011.

⁴⁶ "I believe that the Salafist Jihadists destabilize national security." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

⁴⁷ "Salafist Jihadists are the same as ISIS. They call themselves Salafists and we call them Salafists Jihadists but they are ISIS." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁴⁸ "I heard that some of the Free Army fighters were trained here, which is a moderate faction according to all." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

⁴⁹ "We have to agree that the Free Syrian Army is the one who started the fight against the Syrian regime." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

Figure 1). In its favor, some respondents thought the FSA had the approval and support of the Jordanian central government, which was believed to have provided the group with training facilities in Ramtha and Mafrq.⁵⁰ However, it was also viewed with suspicion for its perceived links to the US, and several respondents questioned how it was able to source the weapons and financing that allowed it to arm and pay its fighters. A few respondents were even uncertain of the distinction between the FSA and VEOs including JN, and some speculated that the FSA might in fact be fighting with the Syrian regime against other armed groups.⁵¹ The lack of information about, and understanding of, the FSA among respondents in Aqaba probably stemmed both from the group's low media profile and Aqaba's distance from the Syrian border. Furthermore, opposition to the FSA indicated a degree of skepticism in the organization's ability to make a significant impact on the course of the Syrian conflict and achieve its stated objective of defeating the Assad regime.⁵² Indeed, many in Aqaba believed that the existence of the FSA, along with that of other armed groups including VEOs, is contributing to prolonging the conflict and the suffering of Syrian civilians, thus damaging the FSA's legitimacy and appeal to locals.

"The Jordanian government supports the Free Syrian Army and many people here believe that the Free Syrian Army is good but I think the Free Syrian Army is corrupt and they call for secularism but they are funded by America."

(Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁵⁰ "The operations rooms that were in Ramtha and Mafrq did the training for the Free Syrian Army." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

⁵¹ "People think maybe Jabhat Al Nusra is with the FSA, but some think not. But I don't know whether they're truly against the Syrian regime or even with the Syrian regime." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

⁵² "You assume that the FSA is fighting Assad's army but you don't know this for certain. If I were sure they were fighting Assad's army I would support them, because he is really making his people suffer - even small kids. You can watch on the news how they are being killed by his army." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

2.2 SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL AND NON-VIOLENT ISLAMIST GROUPS

Salafist Quietists have a marginally better reputation than Salafist Jihadists but are still seen as a gateway to VE.

Salafist Quietists, including a collective known as the Ahbab group,⁵³ have a presence in Aqaba City. They are often observed in, or close to, mosques within the governorate, where they sometimes hold classes – particularly in the Omar Bin Al Khattab Mosque of Aqaba City.⁵⁴ Most respondents were either critical of Salafist Quietists, stated that they did not see any difference between Salafist Quietists and Jihadists, or were simply unaware of them. The social behavior of Salafist Quietists in particular attracted criticism and they were described by some as unpleasant people, or rude toward Muslims that they deemed insufficiently observant.⁵⁵ Others were concerned that Salafists, even if they adhere to a Quietist rather than a Jihadist ideology, nonetheless represents a gateway to VE beliefs and VEO participation. These concerns stemmed from the notion that the Salafist Quietist form of Islam may lead locals to develop strong views on jihad and to believe that it is their duty to perform jihad in Syria.⁵⁶ Consequently, some respondents condemned Salafist Quietists, as they feared their teaching could radicalize local youths and encourage them to fight jihad as VEO recruits.⁵⁷ They also expressed concerns that the central government is not regulating Salafist Quietist preaching in the governorate as part of a strategy to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies.⁵⁸ Quantitative findings showed 40 percent of respondents believed there is ‘strong’ or ‘some’ opposition to Salafist Quietists in their community, whereas only 17 percent believed there is ‘strong’ or ‘some’ support (see Figure 1). Thus, a minority of respondents did express support for Salafist Quietists and some described them as fundamentally peaceful people, who are mainly concerned with religious study and observance. Others expressed positive views about Salafist Quietists because they saw them as preferable to the MB, which they strongly criticized for its anti-establishment political stance. In contrast, Salafist Quietists were commended for their non-engagement in politics.⁵⁹ Salafist Quietists were further contrasted with the MB in terms of their recruitment strategy:

⁵³ “There is more than one group that gives religious classes, some of them are from the Muslim Brotherhood, others are Salafists or Jihadists or the Ahbab group.” (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁵⁴ “Salafists don’t follow one person as a leader, they follow the companions of the prophet in general, they are in all the mosques, and many of them are in Aqaba.” (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

⁵⁵ “The Salafists we have here are very strict people. I mean, they are strict about the Hadith and the Qur’an but they don’t treat people kindly, which goes against what the Prophet Muhammad taught. They don’t promote virtue. All that they do is prevent vice.” (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

⁵⁶ “Salafist Quietists are a gateway to extremist groups from their religious scripts that they read that say jihad is good and that the Shia are infidels.” (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

⁵⁷ “The Salafist Quietists are more radical than the Muslim Brotherhood. They say you have to see God in everything you do in life. They say that everything is haram and this is exactly the same as extremist groups.” (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

⁵⁸ “The Salafist current in Jordan, which is working lawfully - the government supports them and provides them with platforms to communicate with the youth today. This current is responsible directly for extremism; the people that are listening to them are receiving the seeds of extremism.” (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

⁵⁹ “First of all, we need to understand the difference between Salafism and the Brotherhood. I disagree with the Muslim brotherhood. There is a difference between the Brotherhood and preaching Salafism. Rebelling against the leader is one of the principles the Brotherhood follows, and we can see this by looking at what they did in Egypt and

where the MB was seen to use its network of Qur'anic study centers to attract recruits and promote itself through public events,⁶⁰ Salafist Quietists were thought to expand their numbers predominantly by approaching worshippers at mosques in Aqaba City. In providing one example of this style of recruitment, a respondent described how a Salafist Quietist would frequently greet him outside the mosque he attended before inviting him to meet socially. However, this process was not described as either structured or formalized and seemingly highlights the low profile maintained by Salafist Quietists in Aqaba. Indeed, 42 percent of GQ respondents stated that they either have not heard of Salafist Quietists or that their community is 'neutral' toward them (see Figure 1).

"I was leaving the mosque. I had just finished praying, and a person approached me, asked me how I was, and if everything was good with me. And he said Mashallah, you seem like a good guy. The next day the same thing and on the third day he said "would you like to have coffee?" This is how they pull you in. Salafists recruit through mosques and they have weekly sessions at their houses but beyond this they are not very organized."

(Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

Respondents are divided over whether the MB and its political wing, the IAF, have a positive or a negative influence on the governorate.

Opinions of the MB and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), are varied in Aqaba: they were both strongly criticized by some respondents and equally robustly defended by others.⁶¹ Quantitative findings reflected this variation in opinions, as 31 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to the IAF in their community, while 31 percent thought there is 'strong' or 'some' support for the party (see Figure 1). Notably, a significant proportion of respondents, 37 percent, believed that people in their community held a neutral position on the IAF (see Figure 1), which may be indicative of a wider ambivalence towards the MB. The MB attracted criticism for a variety of reasons, including a perceived reluctance or unwillingness to openly denounce VEOs,⁶² undermining the central government in order to strengthen its own political power base,⁶³ opposing free speech and periodically holding violent protests at which property has been destroyed by protestors.⁶⁴ It was also

Tunisia. However, preaching Salafists do not try to rebel against the leader because they know that this would affect the stability and safety of the country they live in." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

⁶⁰ "The Muslim Brotherhood has a different way of recruiting to the Salafists. They have Qur'an centers and they have Islamic schools. This is how they pull people in and they are more developed as an organization than the Salafists." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁶¹ "The MB has a lot of supporters and a large popular base here in Aqaba." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

⁶² "I didn't see any official statement for the Muslim Brotherhood that criticizes Jabhat Al Nusra or ISIS, that's why I cannot consider them to be against Al Nusra or ISIS." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

⁶³ "Many of the statements of the MB are against Jordan and against the Jordanian leadership in general." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

⁶⁴ "Why were their offices closed then? I'm sure there is something wrong they did it. If they were peaceful, the government wouldn't have closed their offices. They always talk badly about the government and they only care about themselves. They tell people to hate authority and they promote hate in their speeches. What is right about

presented as unfit to govern, a view that respondents supported with reference to the MB's brief tenure in Egypt under then-President, Mohammad Morsi.⁶⁵ The central government was also thought to have concerns about the activities of the MB, which several respondents linked to the closure of the MB's Amman headquarters in April 2016.⁶⁶ Another criticism leveled at the MB related to its religious teaching, and a small minority of respondents even placed the organization in the same bracket as ISIS and JN, arguing that the MB should, like these VEOs, be considered an organization that adheres to an extreme form of Salafist ideology.⁶⁷ They justified this classification by stating that the MB encourages its supporters to participate in jihad in Syria and Iraq (see below).⁶⁸ Indeed, several respondents believed that the MB actively encouraged its members to join Jaysh Al Islam at the beginning of the Syrian conflict.⁶⁹ Conversely, some portrayed the MB as a barrier to the spread of VE in Aqaba. These supporters emphasized that the organization opposes violent jihad, wishes to help the Syrian people and does not encourage its members to participate in the Syrian conflict even though it opposes the Assad regime.⁷⁰ Regardless of their perspective on the MB and IAF, it is clear that the MB was a divisive issue for respondents, that it has a high profile and that it enjoys some influence in Aqaba. The latter is evident particularly through its ties to local mosques and its Qur'an study centers.

"I don't think that the Muslim Brotherhood is peaceful and they give Islam a bad image. For example they only employ people from the same background and you will see that they do that in their hospitals and schools and work. They always try to look like they are against the government and cause problems. This is not freedom of speech. At weddings they bring a special religious leader to talk about the government and the Al Aqsa Mosque and promote violence. This is not right and not the place to do that. I am not against peaceful protest but the Muslim Brotherhood is not peaceful."

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

them protesting in the street and damaging everything? They are against the government and there are many examples of them breaking things when they protest and they burn stuff too." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

⁶⁵ "I believe that the Muslim Brotherhood represent a problem in Jordan, because they support the concept of demonstrations, marches and protests that are not a part of our religion." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

⁶⁶ Al Jazeera, 2016. 'Jordan closes Muslim Brotherhood headquarters in Amman', Al Jazeera, April 14, 2016.

⁶⁷ "The Muslim brotherhood is the mother group of all the others – JN, Daesh and AQ - let's be blunt." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

⁶⁸ "The Muslim Brotherhood claim they are moderate but this is not true, because there are many people from the Muslim Brotherhood, such as this man I know who went from Aqaba, who go to join these extremist groups." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

⁶⁹ "The Muslim Brotherhood talked about Syria for a while and when Al Qaradawi announced jihad in Syria, they recruited people but not for very long. They recruited people to join Jaysh Al Islam in Syria, because it is part of the Muslim Brotherhood." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁷⁰ "The Muslim Brotherhood is an obstacle keeping people away from joining VEOs. They understand that you are speaking about an Islamic ideology. Some use it in an extremist way, the Brotherhood has an Islamic ideology without extremism or weapons in its methodology. They do not act against the state or citizens and they don't believe in change through shedding blood. You have to combat the Islamic speeches and rhetoric with an Islamic rhetoric." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

Detractors accuse the MB of encouraging members to fight jihad in Syria, and of teaching children at its Qur'an centers to aspire to perform jihad.

Many respondents were highly critical of the language employed by MB members – both in speeches delivered in local mosques, and at the network of Qur'an study centers that it runs in Aqaba. In particular, the MB was criticized for teaching children that jihad is both a positive thing and a duty for Muslims, which is a perspective that VEOs also strongly promote to attract new members. In fact, some respondents thought that for this reason the MB could sometimes act as a stepping-stone towards more radical religious beliefs. One individual offered an example of a local who was initially with the MB before becoming a Salafist and being arrested by the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID) for expressing support for ISIS.⁷¹ MB Qur'an centers were also believed to place strong emphasis on concepts often associated with VE including martyrdom, the Caliphate, and the idea that non-Muslims are inferior to Muslims. This was thought to have made those youths in Aqaba who attended Qur'an centers when they were younger more vulnerable to VE messaging and/or VEO recruitment in later life.⁷² Similar rhetoric was also observed by some respondents who were students or have links to the local university in Aqaba, who were critical of the behavior of students affiliated to the MB there.⁷³ Others thought that MB-affiliated students openly sympathize with VEOs including JN.⁷⁴ At least one MB member from Aqaba is known to have joined JN in Syria with the primary motivation of participating in jihad and reaching heaven, both of which are concepts the MB is accused of teaching in its study centers.⁷⁵ As long as these study centers are unregulated by the central government or the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, it is likely that they will continue to teach children about Islam in a way that may lead them later in life to contemplate active participation in jihad.

"The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists are to blame for radicalization. These people are raised on jihad and extremism. They raise them on ideas such as the belief that if they kill infidels they will go

⁷¹ "This guy who was jailed for sympathizing with ISIS, his brothers were in the Muslim Brotherhood and they wore beards. This guy took their ideology but made it even stricter and more backward, then he was recruited by the Salafists." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

⁷² "There are a few Islamic groups in Aqaba, but they are still not dangerous. Some young people do not accept different opinions, especially those who belong to Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists. Young people who were raised at the Brotherhood's schools with an Islamic ideology agree with the ideas of jihad and the Caliphate but they haven't had the opportunity to show this." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

⁷³ "As for my university in Aqaba, it is very small, and the presence of Muslim Brotherhood members is limited. Even though I dealt with them for a while, we had common work in student cases, and they used to refuse to work or cooperate with anyone. They refused to work with unveiled women in some activities, such as the elections of the student board." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

⁷⁴ "I was debating with one of the students who is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was against these groups completely and accused them of terrorism. He used to say that he is not with ISIS nor Jabhat Al Nusra. But when we used to say that Jabhat Al Nusra and ISIS are terrorists and they do not represent Islam, he defended them. He didn't join these groups, but he sympathized with them." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

⁷⁵ "This young man from Aqaba was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. After the events in Syria he joined Jabhat Al Nusra and stayed with them for a year and then he came back to Aqaba. He said he wanted to defend his sect in the sectarian war that was happening between Alawites and Sunnis, but his real motive was that he wanted to fight jihad and to go to heaven." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

to heaven. In any Qur'an center, children grow up with this rhetoric and this theology. I personally lived this when I was a child. They plant these ideas in our heads when we're eight years old, and that's how it's natural to grow up as an extremist."

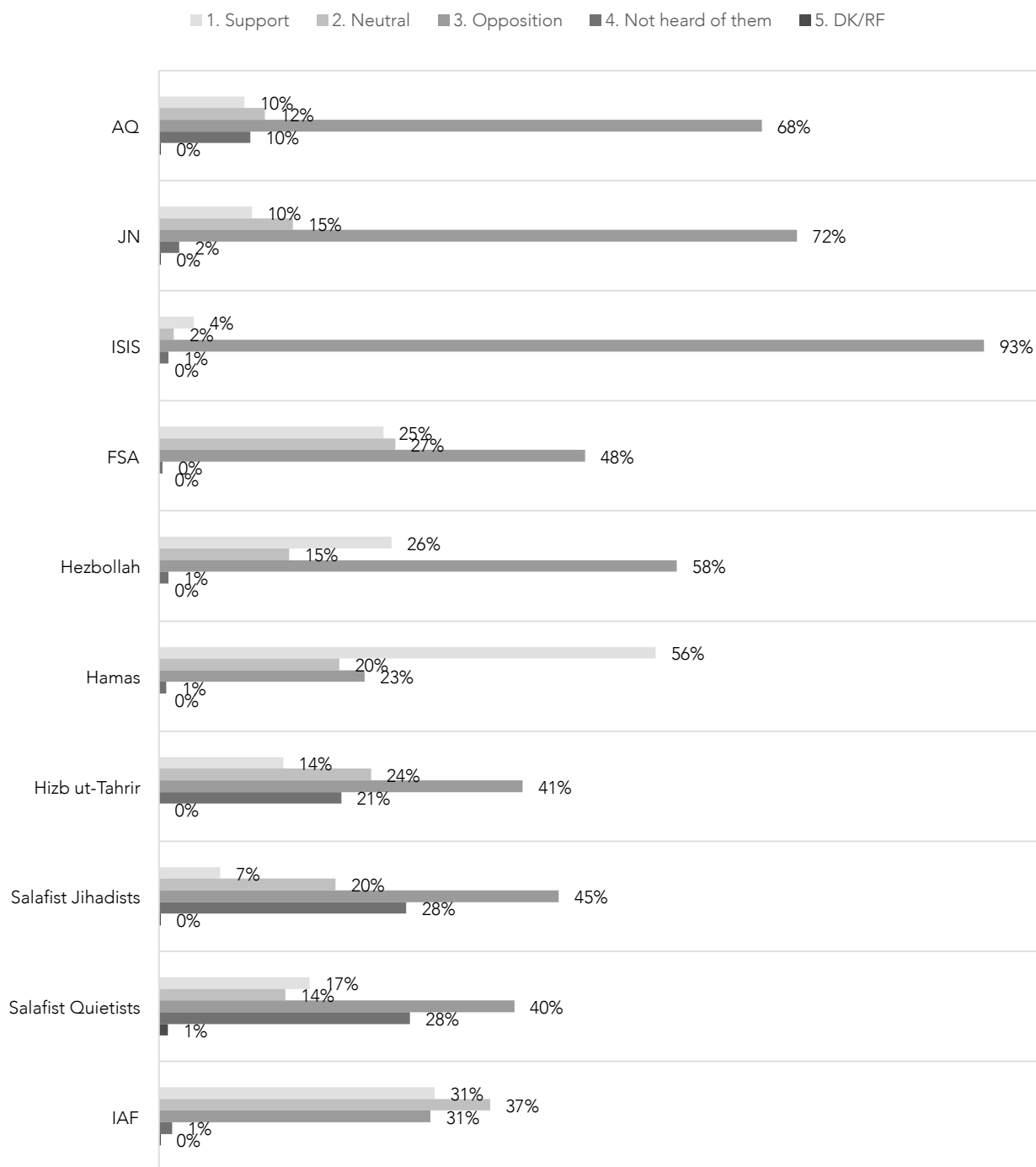
(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

Focus: How a member of the MB traveled to Syria to fight then returned to Aqaba.

"Some left Aqaba to fight and returned like my brother, who joined Ahrar Al Islam, which was an independent armed group, an Islamic faction. I didn't want him to go because I understand the conflict is much bigger than what we see, however he went at a time when everyone wanted to fight against the Syrian regime, in 2012. I was shocked he went and I did my best until finally I managed to convince him and his friend to return. He stayed for four months and he originally decided on his own to go. Any Muslim knows that jihad is a duty, even non-Muslims, because its aim is to fight injustice and colonialism. He is a member of the Muslim brotherhood here. When they found out he had gone they rejected him and froze his membership immediately. He went to Turkey and from there to Syria. We don't have any official position that would encourage members to make this choice and he overstepped the mark in what he did. The Brotherhood supports the Syrian cause and wants to reduce the suffering of the Syrians inside Syria. If it was just left to the Syrian people then they could have defeated the regime, but getting people from outside Syria to fight allowed the regime to bring in Hezbollah. External intervention made things worse and Syria would have been better without it. My brother was arrested for four days when he returned, but he doesn't get harassed now. He was involved only in logistics and he didn't fight in the full sense of the word."

(Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

Figure 1: To what extent do you think there is support or opposition for the following groups in your community?

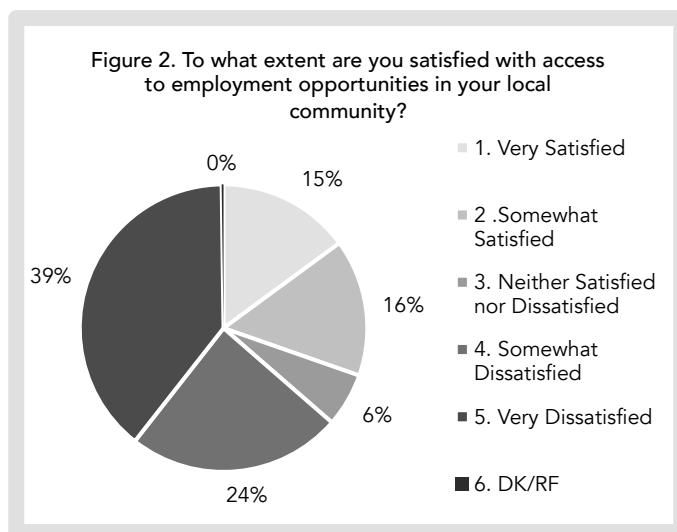


3.0 BASIC NEEDS DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

3.1 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Aqaba's employment market benefits from the tourism and hospitality sectors but the majority is still frustrated at the scarcity of job opportunities.

Aqaba has a stronger local job market than other governorates in Jordan given the spread of opportunities in the tourism sector. As such, local youths are more likely to find employment in the governorate, particularly in Aqaba City. The availability of job opportunities was believed to reduce the likelihood that locals, especially youths,⁷⁶ could be vulnerable to VEO recruitment narratives that stress the financial rewards of membership.⁷⁷ However, it remains arduous to find work in rural villages that lack the hotels and restaurants catering to tourists found in Aqaba City.⁷⁸ In fact, 63 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents stated that they were 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with access to employment opportunities in their local community, while 31 percent said they were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied (see Figure 2). Many respondents who explained that locals, especially youths, are struggling to find employment, expressed fears that this may be contributing to social issues including drug abuse and petty crime.⁷⁹ They were also concerned at the lack of skilled jobs or government jobs for local graduates who are often obliged to look to the Gulf and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) for suitable opportunities.⁸⁰ Some complained that priority for jobs in the state sector is often given to people from outside the governorate, particularly Amman. Indeed, one respondent offered the recent example of former Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, who is rumored to have brought a number of staff with him to



⁷⁶ "I'm sure that many kids are vulnerable and they get targeted by extremist groups and they would join these groups out of necessity because they need money." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

⁷⁷ "When a person is in distress because they haven't found a job, they haven't found a place where someone can offer a helping hand or a place to develop their skills that might lead to college with their tuition paid for them, this person can feel abandoned to an extent that they commit wrongful actions. They will find themselves with time on their hands and they might spend time with a group with radical views and little by little they will bring them round to this radical way of thinking." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

⁷⁸ "Recently in a certain village we were sitting with people and one of the leaders said that if a guy from ISIS came to Aqaba he will be able to recruit some people from here because they are unemployed and they have nothing to do." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

⁷⁹ "We have unemployment, financial problems and social problems. We should find ways to employ the youth before someone else comes and brainwashes them." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

⁸⁰ "Even if you talk to a university graduate and told him that you can give him a job in a foreign country he would not say no." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

Aqaba when he took up a new role in the city after leaving office in May 2016.⁸¹ Meanwhile, several respondents blamed refugees for a lack of local employment opportunities,⁸² because they are thought to accept lower wages than Jordanians – in some instances less than half of the 400 Jordanian Dinars (JD) monthly salaries a local Jordanian would be prepared to accept.⁸³ There are some central-government funded institutions in Aqaba that are trying to address the issue of unemployment including the Information Technology Center, which aims to enhance the skills of unemployed youths and entrepreneurs in the governorate. However, such initiatives have not significantly reduced unemployment. Furthermore, whatever the reasons for job scarcity, as long as local high school and university graduates struggle to find employment it seems they will be more at risk of VEO recruitment than if they were employed. It is also clear that despite benefitting from its tourism sector, there is still a shortfall in job openings in Aqaba.

"It has become harder to find work in the public sector, due to the lack of vacancies. We are talking here about governmental institutions such as the passports department, the legislation department, civilian affairs department, and ministry sectors in the province of Aqaba, such as the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment."

(Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

There is good access to all levels of education in Aqaba but the quality is widely criticized.

81 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents stated that they were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied with access to education in their community, while 16 percent said they were 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied (see Figure 3). Those finding fault with the quality of education highlighted numerous issues including overcrowding due to an influx of Syrian refugee children,⁸⁴ a lack of discipline and low standards of teaching due to unprofessional staff, and a curriculum that needs revising. The quality of secondary education was singled out as being particularly poor, especially in rural villages like Al Quweira. A common criticism was that the education system in Aqaba, and in Jordan as a whole, is to blame for promoting commonly accepted Islamic concepts – mainly jihad – in such a way that pupils feel they have a duty to perform combative jihad later in life. There were concerns that this makes such children vulnerable to VEO messaging when they are at their most impressionable in their late teens and early

⁸¹ "There is unemployment in Aqaba, and there are people suffering from this, and many people that are underemployed – not working in their own specialization, and there are people that come from Amman to Aqaba for a position. The Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour was here after he left his position. He brought six other employees from Amman, providing each of them a salary of 3500 Jordanian Dinars (JD) with accommodation as well. And there are people from Aqaba itself that have been unemployed for three to four years, and some of them are graduates. Is that not injustice?" (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

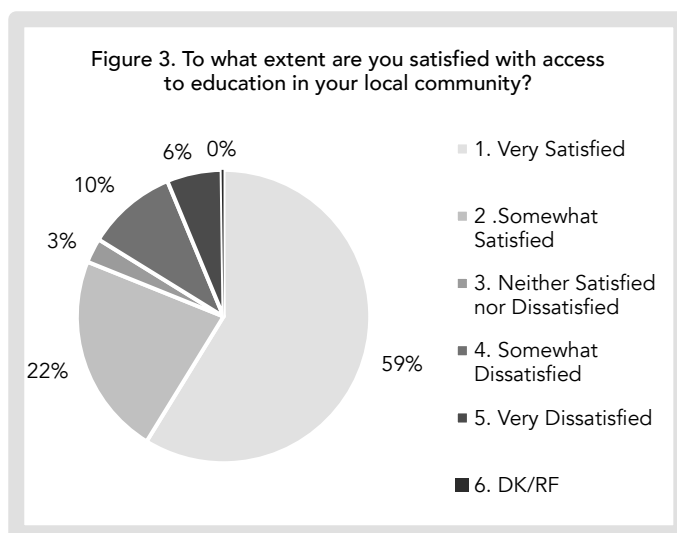
⁸² "We are experiencing an economic storm. There are more Syrian refugees and fewer resources. Tourism is not doing so well. The problem of Syria and the terrorist attacks in Egypt are affecting the tourism business in the Arab region". (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

⁸³ "I know that refugees get help from international organizations but they are not providing enough. The main problem here is limited resources. We also have a problem with job opportunities because they now take Jordanians' opportunities in the job market." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

⁸⁴ "The refugees have made the schools very crowded." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

twenties,⁸⁵ and when they are at university.⁸⁶ However, this interpretation was not universally accepted, and some respondents argued that steps had been taken to address radical religious material in the school curriculum. For example, one observed that former Minister of Education, Dr. Ishaq Al Farhan, has introduced a book for teachers, written by a moderate religious sheikh, to help them understand and teach children about Islam.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, some respondents insisted that the education system fails to adequately inform youths about basic religious concepts, making them vulnerable to VEO messaging that plays on simple themes like heaven, hell and the virgins who are the martyr's reward.⁸⁸ Likewise, most respondents believed that under-education, often a result of failure to complete high school, could render youths vulnerable to radicalization and VEO propaganda.⁸⁹ This is despite the fact that most local children have access to free government schools. Meanwhile, locals who are unable to afford university education – as higher education is not free in Jordan – were similarly thought to be in danger of becoming frustrated and thus vulnerable to VE narratives.



"Kids here go to school whenever they want and they come late. They don't get a real education. Teachers smoke in front of the kids as well. It is chaos. Unfortunately these kids have no manners at

⁸⁵ "An individual might feel a duty to do to jihad, so he starts to defend this position through Islam and the idea of a Caliphate. The education system and curriculums in schools will make these people become more extreme. Books on religion for the 4th, 5th and 6th grades contain so much extremism." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

⁸⁶ "They recruit through universities; most of the people who went to Syria were university students. My friend didn't know anything about these groups until he entered university. He was recruited by people who were also in the university. The government doesn't know about this." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

⁸⁷ "Some people think it is written in the 7th grade religion curriculum that a Muslim should not greet others from other religions on their holidays but I have never read that and I think it is not there. Also, I don't blame the MB for all of the curriculums. The minister that held both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Awqaf was Dr Ishaq Al Farhan, and he developed the teacher's message, a book aiming to provide a general understanding of Islam, written by Ali Al Tantawi, a moderate Syrian Sheikh. He distributed this book to teachers as mandatory reading material." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

⁸⁸ "The extremist groups try to get to the easily targeted individuals who are not educated enough. They tell them about heaven and Hoor Ein (heaven women) while the uneducated youth are not aware of what they are about to do." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

⁸⁹ "If I was to describe someone at risk of radicalization I would say someone older than 18, who is unemployed, who didn't complete their studies at high school, whose life has come off the road. This person is passing through a teenage phase and wants to show his manliness, and in this phase he is very vulnerable to ideological arguments." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

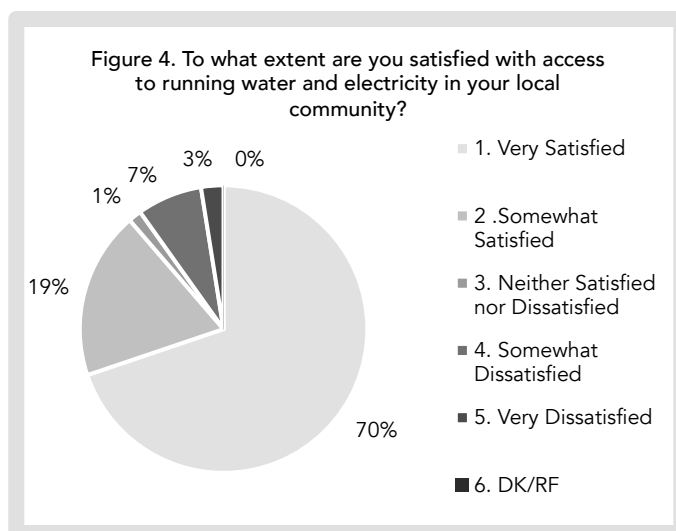
all and social media occupies all their time.

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

3.2 UTILITIES AND SERVICES

Residents are satisfied with access to water and electricity.

The vast majority of respondents were pleased with their access to, and the quality of,⁹⁰ both water and electricity in Aqaba. 89 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents stated that they were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied with access to running water and electricity in their community, while only 10 percent said they were 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied (see Figure 4). In terms of the electricity supply being able to meet current and future demand, the governorate benefits from being the site of one of Jordan's biggest state-owned electricity plants, Aqaba Thermal Power station, which is 22 kilometers (about 14 miles) south of Aqaba City and has a capacity of 656 megawatts.⁹¹ Local developers



are also encouraged to supply their projects' needs with their own power generating sources, taking pressure off the state-run power grid and reducing the risk of power shortages for Aqaba residents. The most recent example of this trend is the three-megawatt Ayla Solar Plant, which came on stream in mid-2015.⁹² Consequently, it is likely that locals will continue to enjoy a regular and reliable electricity supply in contrast to other governorates including Amman, which suffer from shortages that can cause temporary power cuts. Though some respondents did complain that electricity in Aqaba is expensive.⁹³ Respondents were happy with their access to water and noted that it could be drunk direct from the faucet in most households.⁹⁴ Although some complained that refugees had placed a strain on already limited resources in the governorate and in Jordan as a whole, especially with regards to water.⁹⁵ As Aqaba has an arid climate with low precipitation, and relies on a combination of desalination plants close to the coast and the Disi aquifer for its water,⁹⁶ there are concerns that if relatively scarce water resources are not carefully managed then there may be shortages in future.

⁹⁰ "In Aqaba it's different because we have the water every day. But for the other cities no – they have mains water only one or two times per week." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

⁹¹ Aqaba Thermal Power station statistics. Available at: <<http://www.cegco.com.jo/?q=en/node/74>>

⁹² Jordan Times, 2015. 'Aqaba developer's renewable energy project to start operating next month', Jordan Times, March 21, 2015.

⁹³ "Electricity in Aqaba is good and we never have a problem with power cuts. It works well. The only thing is that it's expensive. For a normal household of four it costs 20 to 30 JD per month." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

⁹⁴ "The water in Aqaba is good and it comes from Disi. It is mineral water and you can drink it from the tap, but it depends on the pipe, so sometimes if it's an old pipe you can't drink it. But if it's a normal house or a new house you can drink it. We are now even sending Disi water to Amman and Zarqa." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

⁹⁵ UNHCR, 2016. 'Persons of Concern: Zaatari Refugee Camp'. Accessed August 10, 2016.

⁹⁶ Waller, Peter and Akrum Tamimi, 2004. 'Analysis of water allocation in Aqaba,' Arizona University, 2004.

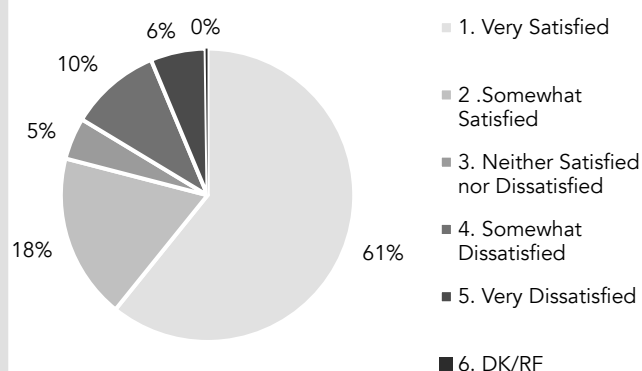
"There are seven million [native] people here in Jordan but currently there are eleven million people in total. We are a country with limited resources so refugees affect the economy. Even if they are in camps they will affect the availability of resources and electricity and services that should go to Jordanians."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

Aqaba enjoys good healthcare provision and a new public hospital was completed in 2013.

The vast majority of respondents viewed the healthcare system in Aqaba in a positive light. This is clear from the 79 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents who stated that they were 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied with access to healthcare in their local community, while only 16 percent said they were 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied (see Figure 5). The governorate has three main hospitals located in or close to Aqaba City, including the government-run Prince Hashem Bin Abdullah II Hospital, which opened in 2013, has a capacity of 238 beds and covers 36,000 square meters.⁹⁷ The other two principal hospitals in Aqaba are the Islamic Hospital and Aqaba Modern Hospital. Both facilities are private and most locals can only use them if they have medical insurance provided by their employer, though this often only gives them access to one, rather than both hospitals.⁹⁸ The quality of private healthcare is thought to be better than that at the public hospital, which respondents complained sometimes suffers from staff shortages and/or overcrowding.⁹⁹ Some blamed this on the number of Syrian refugees in the governorate.¹⁰⁰

Figure 5. To what extent are you satisfied with access to healthcare in your local community?



"In Aqaba we have three hospitals: Aqaba Modern, Islamic Hospital and Prince Hashem Hospital [Prince Hashem Bin Abdullah II Military Hospital]. Two of the hospitals are private, so you have to pay money, and Prince Hashem is a government hospital so it is free. But the problem is that it's far from the city center, around ten kilometers (about six miles), and it's not easy to find buses to go there and taxis are expensive." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

⁹⁷ ANSA Med, 2013. 'Aqaba's new hospital satisfied with first successful week', Ansa Med, August 05, 2013.

⁹⁸ "I think if you're going just for a check-up it will cost you 20 JD, plus you must pay for medicine so it will cost you 50 JD, but if you have insurance, it will be cheaper." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

⁹⁹ "The Prince Hashem Hospital is run by the government and many people go there, but they don't have enough staff." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁰⁰ "In the healthcare sector we need to increase the number of hospitals because refugees are making the ones we have too crowded." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

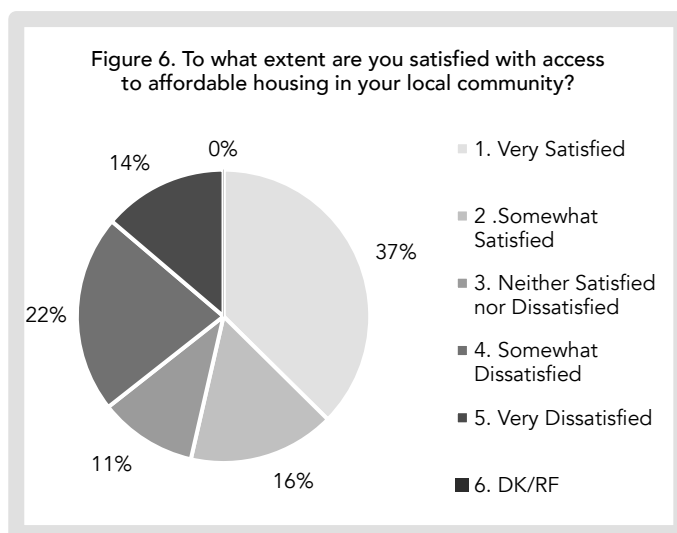
3.3 ECONOMY, HOUSING AND DEBT

Respondents were broadly satisfied with the availability of affordable housing in Aqaba despite a significant population increase in the last twenty years.

Aqaba is a prosperous governorate due to its tourist trade and the investment it has attracted since it was designated a “Special Economic Area” in 2001. As such, the governorate has seen the largest increase in population of any governorate in Jordan, jumping from 79,839 in 1994 to 188,160 in the recent 2015 census.¹⁰¹

Consequently, some respondents in Aqaba are concerned that there is insufficient housing for locals as the influx of Jordanians from other governorates – notably Ma’an and Tafiela – and guest workers – mainly from neighboring Egypt – along with refugees from Iraq and Syria, has put pressure on the stock of existing residential buildings.¹⁰² 53 percent of Aqaba GQ

respondents were ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ satisfied with access to affordable housing in their community, though a significant minority of 36 percent was ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ dissatisfied (see Figure 6). Some large-scale projects are underway, but are unlikely to reduce the strain on existing low-cost housing in Aqaba, as they are targeting wealthy Jordanian and regional buyers. The best example of this trend is the Marsa Zayed project, which plans to construct 30,000 new housing units on a coastal site in the southern outskirts of Aqaba City.¹⁰³ As many local incomes are tied to the tourism sector, especially in Aqaba City, a thriving tourism industry will most likely help locals to be able to afford accommodation in the future, meaning that such projects can have a positive impact on the housing sector even if they do not cater specifically to middle and lower-income locals.



“For an unfurnished house, it’s about 150 JD a month in normal area that is not expensive or fashionable. For a furnished house it is from 200 to 250 JD. Not all locals can afford this. I earn 500 JD per month so I have to pay half my salary to rent a house. Not all the people can do this, because you have many things you have to pay for. I think there is enough housing in Aqaba, it is just expensive sometimes and not all people living here can afford it.”

(Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

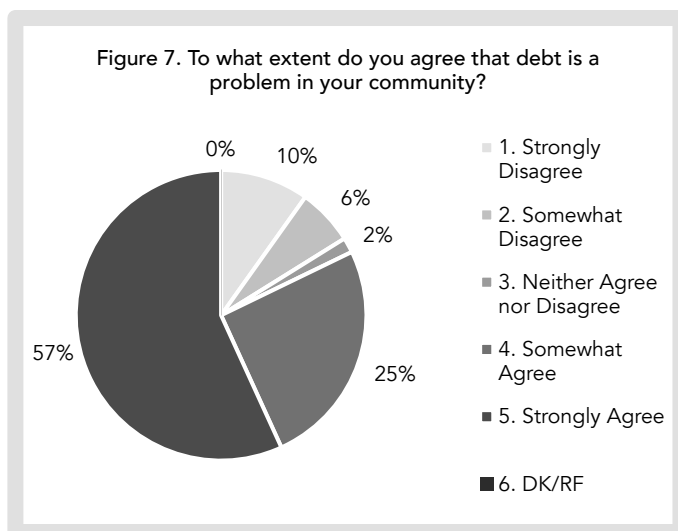
¹⁰¹ Jordan Department of Statistics, 2016. Accessed August 11, 2016.

¹⁰² “The country has become increasingly more expensive, and in particular the rental prices for housing have got higher recently.” (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁰³ Marsa Zayed web site, accessed August 11, 2016. Available at: <www.marsazayed.com>

As with Jordan as a whole, personal debt is a significant concern for residents in Aqaba.

Most respondents believed that the vast majority of locals in Aqaba have personal debts, and often borrow either to make up the shortfall in their salaries or to cover large expenditures like houses, cars or private schooling for children. 82 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that debt is a problem in their community, and only 16 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 7). These findings are consistent with those from other governorates in Jordan, and reflect a broader problem of financial insecurity due to high levels of private debt in the country. Credit is readily available from a number of local, regional and international lenders, mainly banks such as Arab Bank, which offers mortgages in Aqaba starting at 8.5 percent interest per annum.¹⁰⁴ This has caused locals to move away from the traditional system of borrowing, where family members would lend money to one another to help relatives make large purchases like houses or cars, and the shift has prompted a boom in private borrowing. Respondents identified a number of companies with offices in Aqaba City that offer loans from 1,000 JD including Tamweelcom, Mimick and Ahliya. Such local lenders charge as much as 30 percent interest, with some borrowers struggling to repay loans. Repayment is notoriously difficult during holiday periods like Eid when outgoings are higher.¹⁰⁵



"I think that 99 percent of people in Aqaba have loans, because without this you cannot live. If I were to depend on my salary I could not live. Everyone is like this. Sometimes people take loans from banks, sometimes from small companies and sometimes from people, and all of them charge interest. Tamweelcom charges 400 JD interest on a loan of 1,300 JD, and a woman I sometimes borrow money from charges 150 JD interest to borrow 1,000 JD."

(Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁰⁴ This rate was offered by Arab Bank Jordan for those investing in property in the Saraya Aqaba complex currently being built in Aqaba City. Accessed August 26, 2016. Available at: < <http://www.arabbank.jo/en/sarayaaqaba.aspx>>

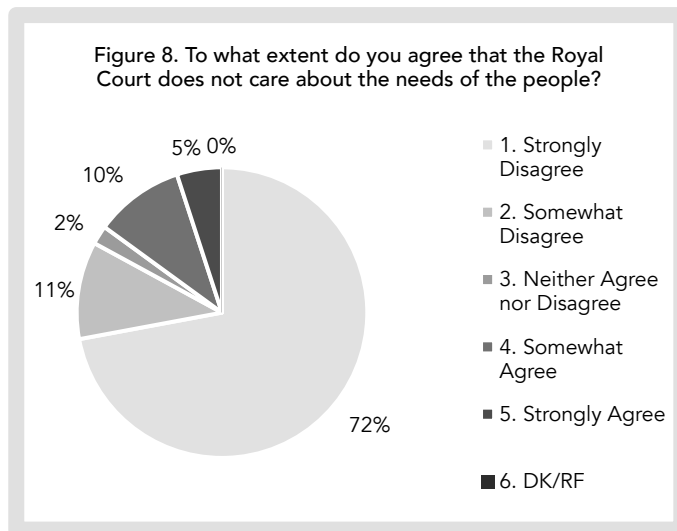
¹⁰⁵ "I go to borrow money at Tamweelcom's office on Al Hammamat Al Tunisyia Street, Mimick is located close to the intersection between Prince Mohammad Street and King Talal Street and Ahliya is located by Ayid Park on Rashid Street. Sometimes you cannot pay back the loans at the right time, especially during occasions like Eid." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

4.0 GOVERNANCE DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

4.1 CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The vast majority in Aqaba has a positive view of the Royal Court and believes it is working to improve conditions for the Jordanian population.

Respondents held overwhelmingly positive views of the Royal Court, which was often strongly associated with the person of King Abdullah II and, to a lesser extent, his late father King Hussein. The King was well regarded by respondents in Aqaba, who stressed the religious and dynastic legitimacy of the royal family.¹⁰⁶ Many also expressed confidence in King Abdullah because they thought he is actively involved in the fight against VEOs. Some referenced his participation in televised campaigns against terrorism, which they believed is vital to ensure that such campaigns attracted popular interest and support. Quantitative findings showed that the vast majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 83 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the Royal Court does not care about the needs of the people, while a small minority of 15 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 8).



"At Friday prayers sometimes they talk about terrorism to teach people. When Kasasbeh died many religious leaders made public speeches. We have the King to help us. He did many things like when he talked about terrorism and that we have to be careful that it does not happen in Jordan. I saw it on TV."

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

The central government is generally well regarded in Aqaba and respondents are confident that it is prioritizing the fight against VEOs in the Kingdom.

The vast majority of respondents in Aqaba viewed VEOs with concern and suspicion, with many expressing fears that VEO activity in Jordan might affect their livelihoods. They were principally concerned that, as Aqaba's local economy is heavily dependent on both local and international tourism, a terrorist attack in the governorate might seriously damage the tourism trade as has happened in the

¹⁰⁶ "In Jordan, the regime was always moderate and communicated with all parties. It's a regime that was built on religious legitimacy considering the royal family is connected with prophet Mohammed's family; they were the honorable families of Hijaz. They have religious legitimacy and legitimacy within the hearts of Jordanians, regardless of their religion. Even Christians have respect for this house of Arabs." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

Egyptian resort of Sharm Al Sheikh.¹⁰⁷ However, they also expressed confidence that limiting the spread of VE ideas and preventing VEOs from establishing themselves in Jordan is a key priority for the central government.¹⁰⁸ As such, 77 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the central government does not want to control VEOs, while only 18 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 9). The security services in Aqaba, especially the intelligence services, were believed to have responded proactively in the few cases where locals have become actively involved with VEOs. In such instances, the GID was known to have interviewed the friends and family of individuals from the governorate who had traveled to Syria to fight with VEOs. The GID has also interviewed residents of the governorate who expressed pro-VEO statements online or in public, and keeps those suspected of VEO sympathies under surveillance.

The police and GID organize outreach programs to engage with locals in the governorate, especially youths. Respondents believed these programs to have been successful in building trust between youth and the security services, and in reducing the likelihood that youths will be seduced by anti-establishment VEO narratives evident in some ISIS propaganda videos.¹⁰⁹ However, a few respondents expressed concerns that the central government is limited in its ability to counter the spread of VE in Jordan. This was based on a perception that the state lacks a strategy to engage on an ideological level with locals, especially youths, who may be vulnerable to VEO messaging, which is widely available online.¹¹⁰ Some respondents were also concerned that VEOs might be able to capitalize on frustration among some locals that the central government does not always act in their interests. While the majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 62 percent, ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the central government does not care about the needs of the people, 36 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 10). Thus, most thought that the central government is using its resources effectively, especially the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Education.¹¹¹ Both ministries have been actively supporting local campaigns in mosques and schools to educate residents about VE, adding to the widespread impression

¹⁰⁷ “The friends of the guy who joined ISIS are talking to the intelligence services now because they want to know more about him. They are also afraid that those kids may work in a hotel one day and they might blow it up after taking orders from this guy. The security forces take extra measures in such situations and detain people before anything can happen. They don’t detain them in a bad way, they just question these kids about their friend and where he is and where he goes and how he lives.” (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

¹⁰⁸ “The main threat from extremist groups is destabilization that affects the economy and tourism, as well social instability.” (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁰⁹ “In Aqaba, we haven’t noticed many radical people or people who have tendency to join extremism for several reasons. The first reason is that the General Security Services are involved with the local community, which means public security people go into communities and organize courses and educate youths and create volunteering initiatives for them. This reinforces the appreciation of the public for the security personnel and strengthens the relationship between the youth and the security services.” (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹¹⁰ “I don’t see that the Jordanian government is fighting terrorism. Even though they do arrest some people, but terrorism has to be fought ideologically, and we don’t have the mentality for this.” (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹¹¹ “The officials and government, and the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic affairs hold direct responsibility for the derailment of the religious rhetoric in mosques. (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

that the central government is making necessary efforts to prevent VEOs from establishing a base in Aqaba.¹¹²

"Yes the government is doing a smart job combatting radicalization through workshops and TV and the media and now we have initiatives everywhere. In Aqaba it happened in schools and centers where they talked about radicalism. The government supported these initiatives. The Islamic Religious Affairs Ministry and Ministry of Education worked on this and talked about terrorism in mosques and schools. All the schools participated in this in Aqaba, and prayers were part of it in all the mosques."

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

Figure 9. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not want to control VE?

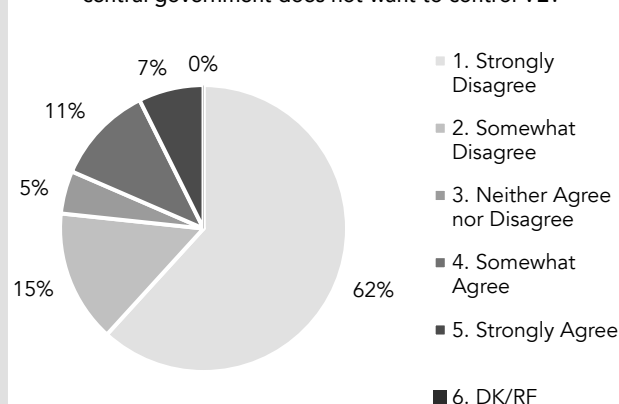
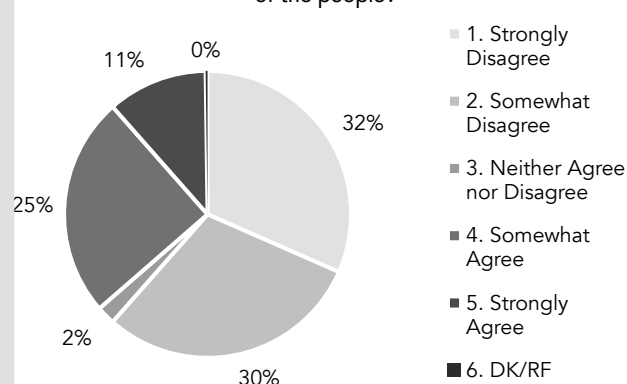


Figure 10. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not care about the needs of the people?



The central government is seen as effective at preventing VEOs from establishing a foothold in Aqaba and/or carrying out attacks.

With reference to the 2005 Amman hotel bombings that killed 60 people and injured a further 115,¹¹³ some respondents expressed concerns about potential terrorist activity on the same scale in other parts of the country. However, they did not think that there is a risk of such an incident in Aqaba.¹¹⁴ In fact, very

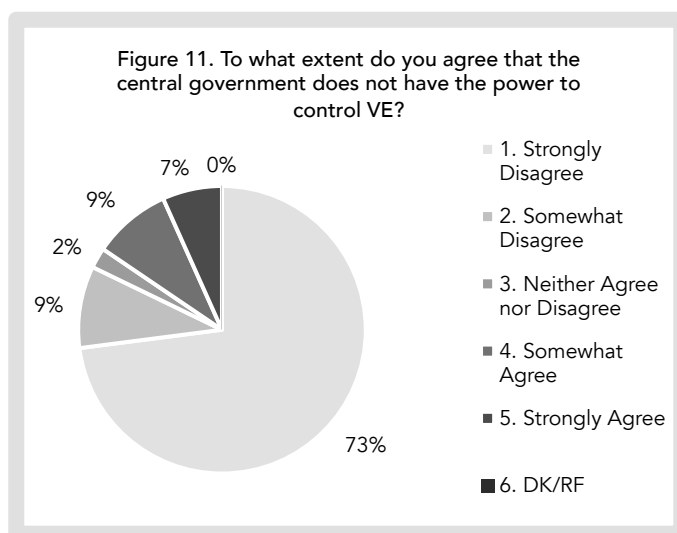
¹¹² "The Jordanian government is supporting the Ministry of Awqaf to develop the religious cultural ideological process. It gave our preachers an increased space for more freedom of speech to help them deliver their messages honestly and fairly. This is the best workshop that can be done against terrorism and extremism - when you have a free voice for a religious scientist who knows the Islamic religion. The government is playing a major role in helping us establishing seminars, lectures and workshops that help increasing the awareness and education of our imams and muezzins to reject terrorism and extremism." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

¹¹³ Ghazal, Mohammad 2015. '10 years after Amman bombings, war on terror remains our war', Jordan Times, November 09, 2015.

¹¹⁴ "Radical groups threaten our peace but thank God we have security here and our people are strong." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

few respondents had ever been affected by VE: 91 percent of Aqaba GQ respondent disagreed that they or their family have suffered directly from VE, while only nine percent agreed (see Figure 12). Respondents expressed strong confidence that the security services in Jordan, comprising the police, GID and JAF,¹¹⁵ have the power to crack down on VEO sympathizers and to prevent them and their ideology from destabilizing the governorate.¹¹⁶ Quantitative findings showed that the overwhelming majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 82 percent, ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the central government does not have the power to control VEOs, while 16 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 11).

Many respondents stressed that they consider Jordan to be one of the most secure and stable countries in the region, and claimed that they had not seen evidence of either locals with VE views or VEO members in Aqaba. Despite this absence of immediate threat however, the central government was still praised for limiting extremism in the nation as a whole and protecting citizens from possible terrorist attacks. There is also a clear spirit of local counter violent extremism activism, and some respondents stated that if they or other citizens in Aqaba became suspicious that an individual or a group was being exposed to VEO messaging or espousing VE viewpoints, they would report them to the local security forces. Furthermore, youth workers coordinate with the police to ensure that they have access to data on local youths involved with any of Aqaba’s seven different youth centers.¹¹⁷ A small minority was critical of what they saw as an official policy to allow would-be VEO members to move from Jordan into Syria in the past, which they thought is increasing the likelihood that locals would be interested in VEOs given the example of peers who had joined. However, the same respondents acknowledged that it is no longer possible to travel illegally to Syria from Jordan with ease, meaning that this has become less of an issue.¹¹⁸



“Though Aqaba is open and people can travel here it is well monitored and our society is quite

¹¹⁵ “We have a strong military system. These extremist groups cannot be active because of the intelligence. The whole country is full of intelligence officers.” (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

¹¹⁶ “Extremist groups definitely pose a real threat to Jordan. I mean one has to be afraid of them. People cling onto any country that still has security and Jordan, praise the Lord, is the country with the best security situation in the Arab world.” (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

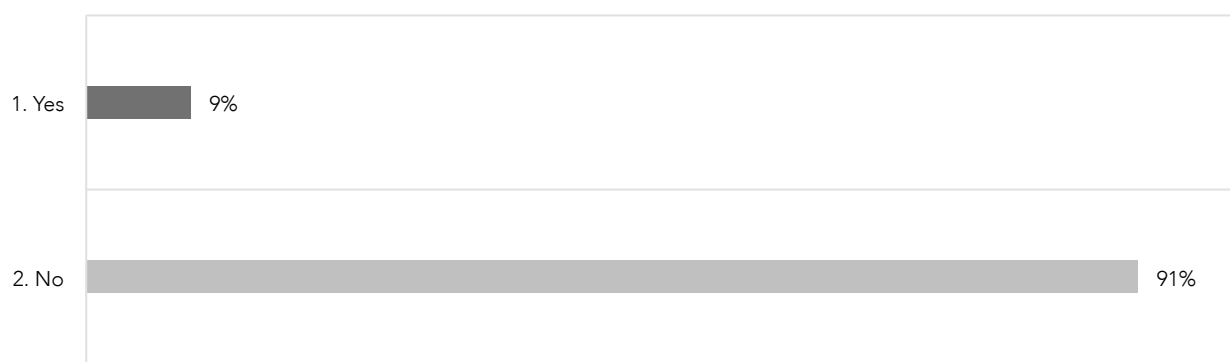
¹¹⁷ “We work with the “friends of the police” and any data we receive, I make sure it can be used to protect my country. We deal with different age groups and therefore any data we receive we make sure to send it to security agencies to be reviewed and monitored.” (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹¹⁸ “They used to help people go out to Syria before. But now, after Moath [Al Kasasbeh], the number of people who go is less and the security procedures are more strict.” (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

closed and people all know each other. So if someone is an outsider this will be clear immediately. If you ask me about anyone here I would be able to give you lots of information on their background and family. We have 120 thousand people in all Aqaba and 90 thousand in the main city alone. In Amman there are millions and there are many different nationalities, so it is harder to keep track of people [there]."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

Figure 12. Have you or your family directly suffered from VE?



The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs plays a key role in the central government's campaign against VE in Aqaba.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs was viewed in a positive light by the majority of respondents, who argued that it plays an important and active role in the fight against the spread of VE ideologies and VEO recruitment in the governorate. They claimed the Ministry is doing a good job in countering the appeal of VE narratives and complimented the manner in which it engages with youths in particular, though it also has programs for women and the elderly.¹¹⁹ The Ministry has orchestrated a series of campaigns targeting youths and preachers in Aqaba's mosques over the last two years.¹²⁰ For example, it works with local youth organizations, including the Noor Al Hussein Institution, to increase awareness about the danger of VE and VEOs using an anti-extremism campaign based around the Amman Message. It also provides training for imams to ensure that rhetoric in the governorate's mosques does not radicalize worshippers or make them more vulnerable to VEO messaging and/or recruitment. In doing so, the Ministry aims to counter commonly-used ISIS narratives including the idea that those who die fighting for the VEO can be certain of a place in heaven. This is part of a wider approach that aims to

¹¹⁹ "The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs communicates with the local community, the women, youths and elderly, through cultural workshops in the mosques or youth centers, or through NGOs in Aqaba." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹²⁰ "The ministry of Awqaf is doing a good job" (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

blunt the appeal of ideological concepts such as the duty of jihad, which VEOs including ISIS exploit in order to recruit.¹²¹

"We worked with young Aqaba residents who started an initiative in 2015 called Islamic culture connector [Almawsil Althaqafi Alislami], which was directed by the Awqaf minister and the mayor in addition to the full support of Marsa Zayed. And we did some workshops in the Noor Al Hussein Institution. We trained them on the basis of the Amman Message, which fights and rejects terrorism and extremism. We taught them to understand the difference between terrorism and violence. We taught them what is the meaning and image of terrorism, how did it happen and where did it come from. It is hard to explain all that in one lecture, so I designed a lot of Islamic scientific material which is available to be used by whoever wants to."

(Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

Focus: An employee of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Aqaba explains how it is fighting the spread of VE.

"For me, I can talk in detail about the Aqaba Awqaf administration since this is where I work. Thank God, in Aqaba, we started to fight terrorism, extremism and violence by training our imams to reject these things using a worldwide-certified training application. We brought international trainers to Aqaba and they trained them on spreading the Amman Message, denouncing terrorism, extremism and violence and explaining to them the art of dialogue, declamation and rhetoric. That was the start of a whole project called "Moderate Islam". After training imams and preachers, we sent them into different fields. The first field was the Ministry of Education targeting the youth in Aqaba city. The second field was the mosques to increase the awareness about fighting terrorism, extremism and violence. One more major thing we have done is increasing our preaching lessons. As you know, we used to have one preaching lesson following afternoon prayers. Now, on the contrary, we asked the Islamic scientists we brought to go and give preaching lessons especially in the main mosques that have the most worshippers per day. We agreed with them that they should increase people's awareness about terrorism, extremism and violence."

(Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

The local government is widely condemned as corrupt and inefficient despite Aqaba's success in attracting outside investment.

The majority of respondents were critical of the local administration, and 50 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the local government does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 13). Though those who agreed were in the majority, opinions were divided as

¹²¹ "Listening to words about heaven is ISIS's way to pull in individuals. But here it is our job as a Ministry of Awqaf to prevent those groups from pulling in individuals, by increasing their awareness about Islamic cultures using our training programs that we work on." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

indicated by the 45 percent who reported that they ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed with this statement. Aqaba has a unique relationship with the central government, as it is the only governorate in Jordan to be designated a “Separate Economic Zone” and as such, since 2001 it has enjoyed considerable financial and administrative autonomy. For example, as the administrative body responsible for Aqaba’s economic development, the Aqaba Separate Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) oversees much of the governorate’s management. Testament to the success of this arrangement, Aqaba has attracted significant investment since being granted its unique status by King Abdullah II – as much as seven billion dollars by 2007 that swiftly exceeded the 2020 target of six billion. But this has also meant that locals blame the ASZEA for any failings in local service provision. As such, it was held responsible for a lack of available housing, especially lower-cost housing. It was also widely criticized for excessive levels of corruption. However, some also deemed the central government corrupt. One respondent for example, contended that former Prime Minister, Awn Shawkat Al Khasawneh, was forced to resign in April 2012 by powerful figures objecting to Khasawneh’s attempts to tackle the corruption that they benefitted from. There was indeed a popular impression of government employees as corrupt: 73 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that government officials are corrupt, while only 19 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 14). Corruption among officials is an important source of local grievance in Aqaba, and unless addressed it will continue to be one of the main criticisms of the local and central governments.

“There is a lack of confidence in the central government at the moment and this is because of corruption. Awn Al Khasawneh was Prime Minister and he started fighting corruption and some big names were clearly guilty. But they were judged to be innocent, and so the people lost trust in the government.”

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

Figure 13. To what extent do you agree that the local government does not care about the needs of the people?

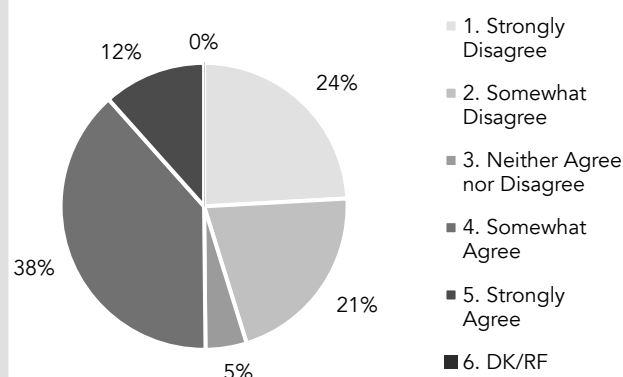
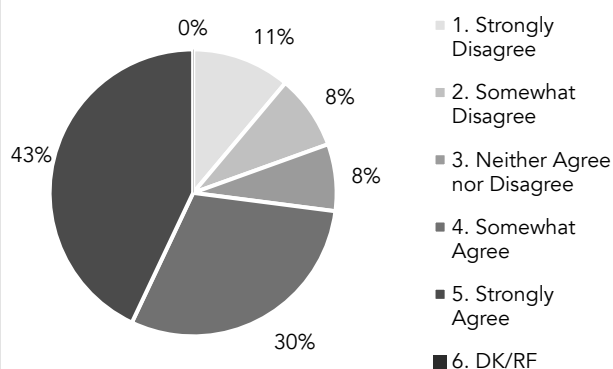


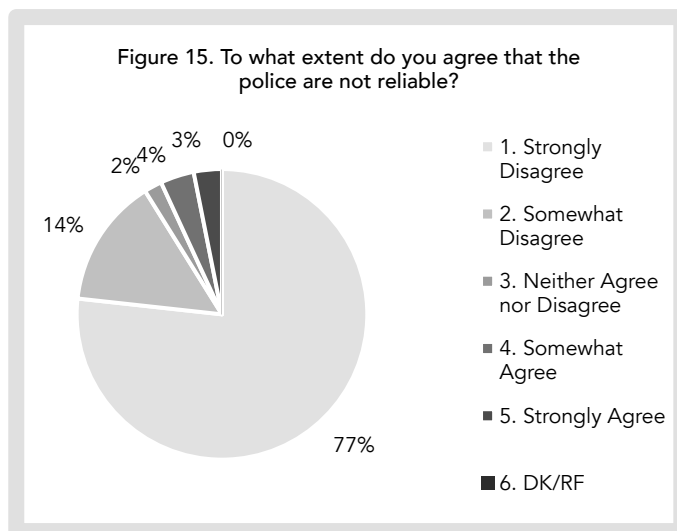
Figure 14. To what extent do you agree that government officials are corrupt?



4.2 LAW ENFORCEMENT

The vast majority of respondents has confidence in the police forces and appreciates the behavior of individual officers.

The police were well regarded by the majority of respondents in Aqaba. Their performance was often linked to the broader security situation in the country, which was seen as stable thanks to the effectiveness of the police, GID and JAF. Quantitative findings showed that the overwhelming majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 91 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the police are not reliable, while only seven percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 15). The police are also thought to use their authority judiciously in most cases, with 90 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents disagreeing that they or their family have suffered from excessive



police authority', while only 10 percent agreed (see Figure 16). The domestic police force, backed by the GID, was widely considered the main bulwark against VEOs in Aqaba and Jordan as a whole. The police in Aqaba play an active role in monitoring both individuals who have expressed support for VEOs in the past and the families of locals who have joined VEOs in Syria. However, some respondents argued that the pressure placed on such families is excessive.¹²² Conversely, some respondents actually endorsed police violence against members of groups that espoused radical views, such as advocating for the creation of an Islamic state in Jordan.¹²³ Generally, a strong and effective police force was seen as essential to stop VEOs from expanding their reach from Syria and Iraq into Jordan, where it was feared they would set up terrorist cells and carry out attacks. The police in Aqaba were judged to be doing a good job in this respect. Furthermore, they were thought to be active in preventing the spread of VE in the governorate by engaging with local youths through a program called 'Friends of the Police'. This entails members of the police force visiting schools and youth centers to explain the role of the police in Aqaba and Jordan. One example is the February 2016 session hosted in the Ekha'a Islamic School in Aqaba City.

"I have lived in Aqaba for 12 years and I have seen that the conditions for radical groups do not exist here because Aqaba is a small place full of security agencies, and because it is a sensitive border area. There is a heavy security presence with intelligence offices and members of the border security

¹²² "This guy has been in Syria with an extremist group for a long time but his family are still here in Aqaba and the police put them under a lot of pressure. (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

¹²³ "We have examples like Ahrar al Tafiela and in Karak, the security worked to take them down and they used to get beaten up by this group still our police was patient. The lawyer for these groups says they were beaten up by the police. They deserve that if they were radical." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

force so Aqaba, praise the Lord, is safer than other governorates in Jordan.”
(Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

Figure 16. Have you or your family directly suffered from excessive police authority?



The JAF is widely popular and seen as highly effective in countering VEO activity.

The vast majority of respondents held a high opinion of the JAF and expressed positive views about its individual members. They also largely trusted the JAF to be competent and effective in their security provision mission. For example, 96 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the armed forces lack the ability to keep Jordan safe, while only three percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 17). As a governorate whose main urban center is in close proximity to the sensitive border with Israel (with whom Jordan has fought in several conflicts including the 1967 ‘Yom Kippur’ war), Aqaba has a significant security presence and many locals are either serving or former members of the JAF. This serves to strengthen local ties to the armed forces and helps explain high levels of support for the armed forces among the local population. Standards of behavior among individual members of the JAF are also thought to be high, as 96 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the armed forces do not behave in a respectful way, while a tiny minority of only three percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 18). Furthermore, the JAF, along with the police force and the GID, was seen as efficient and professional, and was credited for the lack of terrorist attacks or discernible VEO activity in the governorate. Aqaba’s relative security stands in stark contrast to that of the resort town, Sharm Al Sheikh, in Egypt’s unstable Sinai Peninsula. Here, there was a bombing claimed by ISIS that destroyed a Russian passenger plane killing all 224 people on board, shortly after departure from Sharm Al Sheikh’s airport in November 2015.¹²⁴

“In Syria or Egypt, when the governments got weaker, the power of these radical groups started to become apparent and they took over more and more territory. However, in Jordan the security forces are very effective and the security situation is good, and that’s why these terrorist groups have

¹²⁴ BBC, 2015. ‘Russian plane crash: what we know’, BBC News, November 17, 2015.

not appeared in Jordan yet.”
(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

Figure 17. To what extent do you agree that the JAF lack the ability to keep Jordan safe?

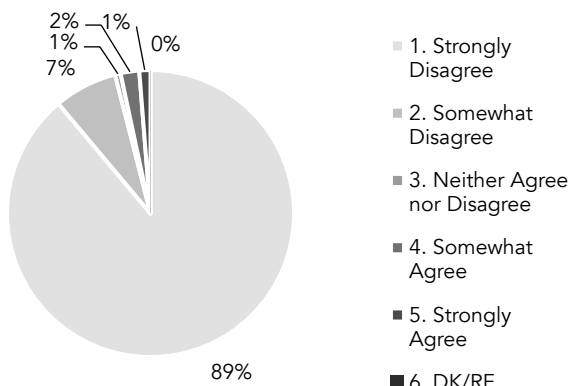
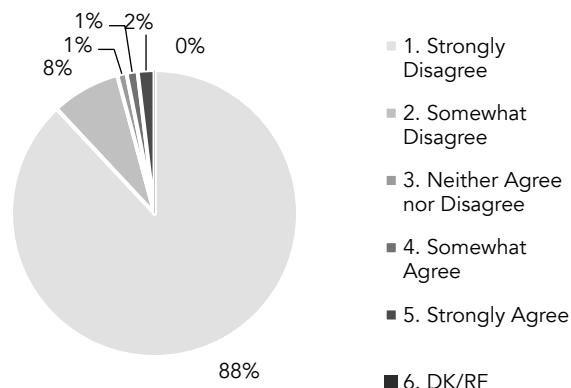


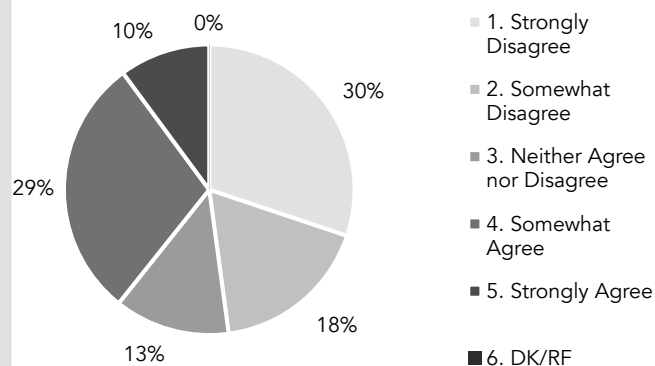
Figure 18. To what extent do you agree that the JAF do not behave in a respectful way?



The civil court system in Aqaba is limited and can only rule on minor criminal cases and civil disputes.

While the majority of respondents were happy that the civil court system in Jordan functions effectively, a sizeable minority expressed doubts about the civil courts. Some were frustrated that Aqaba has only one court with three judges who are limited to passing judgment on minor charges and cannot hand down fines greater than 10 JD. Others complained that the court's technical infrastructure is antiquated and observed that they lack printers and other equipment that could save time. 48 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the civil courts are not effective while 39 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 21). Despite being Jordan's only coastal governorate, Aqaba's civil court also lacks the ability to rule on cases involving maritime law, as none of the judges have the appropriate training. This is a further source of annoyance for respondents.¹²⁵

Figure 21. To what extent do you agree that civil courts in Jordan are not effective?



¹²⁵ "To rule on maritime law the judge in Aqaba needs special training, but Aqaba [also] needs a court that is able to rule on cases involving maritime law." (Female, 35, researcher, Aqaba)

"People in Aqaba do not think the courts are effective because we only have a Court of First Instance, which can only hear appeals for criminal cases where a sentence of one week or less, or a fine not exceeding 10 JD, can be handed down. Only two judges hear criminal cases and one judge adjudicates on civil disputes. The court also lacks administrative employees and even printers that can enable the judges to work quickly. So they need to increase the number of the record and archive employees."

(Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

4.3 HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Most respondents feel confident their human rights are respected by the central government and judge existing anti-terror legislation to be important to maintain security.

Most Aqaba respondents, in contrast to other governorates in Jordan – notably Mafrqa and Madaba – expressed satisfaction that their human rights are being observed by the central government and the legal system. Indeed, 86 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the government does not respect human rights and freedoms, while only nine percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 19). In particular, they did not see the country’s anti-terror laws, which have been condemned by some outside observers as a threat to human rights and freedom of expression in Jordan,¹²⁶ as a danger to their rights. 82 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that the government uses anti-terror laws as an excuse to control others, while only 11 percent reported that they ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 20). Instability in the region, and fears that the upheavals in Syria, Iraq and Egypt may manifest in Jordan, can be seen as contributing factors to these findings. In fact, many respondents were more concerned about security and stability than civil freedoms or the possible use of anti-terror laws to target innocent Jordanians (see below).¹²⁷ However, there were some concerns that locals could in theory be subject to arrest on little or no pretext. They feared that the latter could make locals suspicious of the central government and hence vulnerable to VEO messaging playing on disaffection with the state.¹²⁸

“I don’t think we in Jordan might get affected by these groups; we only have few examples like the one boy I know who went to Syria to fight. I believe that ISIS might be interested in Jordan, especially if they feel we are a country that is falling apart, and then if this is the case they will definitely come here to take advantage.”

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

¹²⁶ HRW, 2015. ‘Jordan: Terrorism amendments threaten rights’, Human Rights Watch, May 17, 2014.

¹²⁷ “We have a problem because we are surrounded by countries that are at war like Iraq and Syria and Palestine. This is not a joke. We are surrounded by a zone in conflict. May God be with the security forces because they are able to control the border.” (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹²⁸ “The stricter the security system is the more people will hate the system.” (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

Figure 19. To what extent do you agree that the government does not respect people's human rights and freedoms?

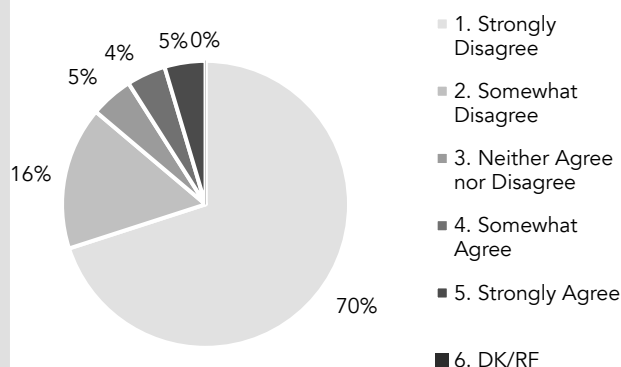
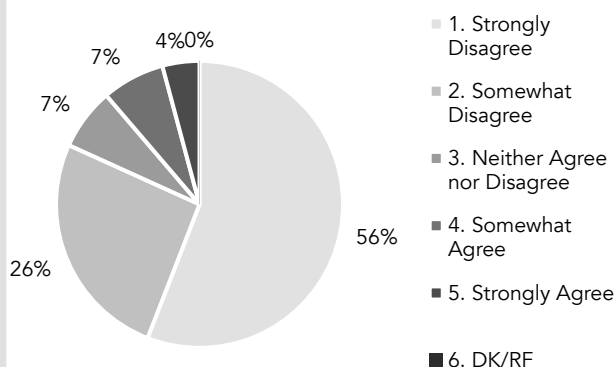


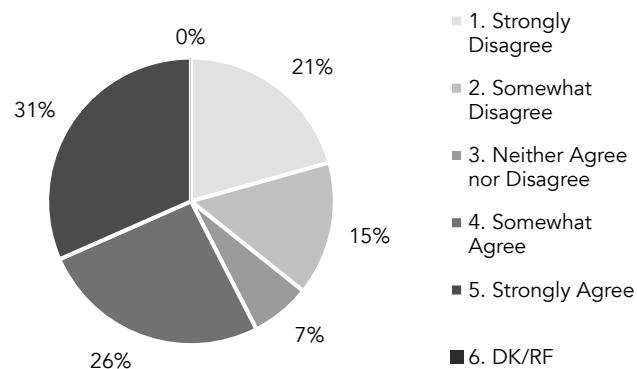
Figure 20. To what extent do you agree that the government uses its anti-terrorism laws as an excuse to control others?



Though political freedom is limited in Aqaba, this is a sacrifice many are willing to make to ensure continued stability and safety from VEO attacks.

A majority of respondents questioned the degree of political freedom enjoyed by ordinary citizens in Jordan, and some criticized Jordan's system of government as undemocratic, arguing that a lack of political freedom can make locals more vulnerable to radicalization.¹²⁹ Accordingly, political expression was described as limited in Aqaba, and any initiatives considered 'political' – in one instance a book club – are reportedly shut down by the security services. This reinforces the impression that political behavior is both closely monitored and restricted.¹³⁰ Some respondents went as far as to suggest that the central government deliberately encourages fear of VEOs and the

Figure 22. To what extent do you agree that the government interferes too much in controlling political parties?



¹²⁹ "Jordan has to change its strategies. They have to allow more freedom for political work. The stricter and more firm the security is, the more people will tend to become extremists." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹³⁰ "I personally participated in many initiatives at university in order to spread awareness on the importance of reading. Reading itself can fight extremism. I organized two book exhibitions at university, a reading club at university and a book club in Aqaba. After that, the club in university was banned, and I couldn't continue the book exhibition last year: the intelligence unit stopped the club outside the university in Aqaba. The excuse was that they do not want any political work inside Aqaba." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

spread of VE in Jordan because it does not want people to demand political freedoms that could weaken the Royal Court's hold on power in favor of political parties or blocs.¹³¹ In fact, 57 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the government interferes too much in controlling political parties, while 36 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 22). Prominent political parties, including the MB, were sometimes seen as collaborators in a closed political system in Jordan,¹³² thus potentially tainting their reputation. Respondents also expressed concerns that the existing lack of political freedoms made it more likely that youths in Aqaba would turn to VEOs because they offer an alternative society where young men can achieve power and status otherwise unavailable to them.¹³³ The lack of permissible outlet for political expression, including campaigning and debate, is causing locals to feel less engaged with the central government and the political system. While there is little evidence that this is currently a serious issue in Aqaba, it does represent a potential source of discontent in the future. This is especially true if tourism, the governorate's main industry and employer, declines and locals face a greater struggle to provide for themselves and their families.¹³⁴

"When you combat the moderate opposition and ban its moderate rhetoric within society, you open the door for the acceptance of extremist ideologies among ordinary people. This happens when the individual witnesses the government oppressing political groups, when they implement fake democracy, and when the elections aren't fair - especially when it is clear that moderate political parties are abiding by the law and regulations."

(Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

The government is thought to exercise excessive censorship over the press.

Despite generally positive views about the central government (see above), many respondents were critical of what they saw as excessive state regulation of the press. The majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 61 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press, while 32 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 23). Some respondents did indicate a preference for Jordanian over international media, expressing their dislike of international news organizations such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, while stating that they habitually watch Jordanian state television channels. However, others argued that the national media is not trustworthy due to heavy government regulation. This is consistent with Freedom House's 2015 classification of the press in Jordan

¹³¹ "I have mentioned that some of our governmental policies aim to create conflict and spread these ideas of extremism to keep people busy and away from thinking of political/economic or public affairs. People are busy pointing out differences; he has a short beard, or a short dress, he has a long beard - it's a heresy. They keep people busy with ridiculous trivial matters." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

¹³² "The Muslim Brotherhood is an economic power in Jordan, and they represent the bourgeois, and they execute a certain agenda that the government draws for them." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

¹³³ "The authorities combat any normal way for a person to express themselves, so they go in a different direction, where they feel they could achieve their goals faster. The youth are impressed by power and the military solution." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

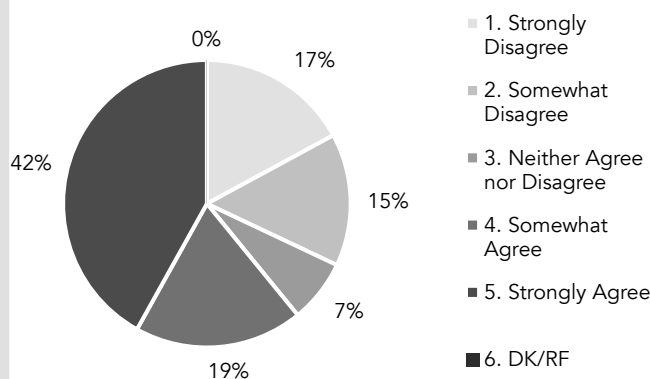
¹³⁴ "It's the tyrannical and oppressive ideology, and when there is a fertile ground for extremism, unemployment, poverty, absence of political life, and marginalization, surely all these things will drive an individual to leave the world for another world - that is only natural." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

as 'not free'. Influencing this classification is the law passed in 2014 that made domestic Jordanian news sites responsible for comments on their articles regardless of the identity of the contributor.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, some respondents judged that many locals differentiate between government media – typified by the newspapers Al Dustour and Al Rai – and 'independent' local news sources including the MB's newspaper Assabeel, which they deemed relatively free from government censorship. Though a muzzled press is a source of irritation for the majority in Aqaba, respondents did not feel strongly about the issue. Thus, it is unlikely that this will prompt locals to take any physical action such as public demonstrations.

"A lot of the people in Aqaba don't think the government controls the press since they believe that we have many different news outlets and many are online such as Amman.net and Takween and Aiber. But no one closed them or controls their news or articles. They see that the leftist party has its own monthly newspaper that is also online and offline and the Muslim brotherhood in Jordan have their own daily newspaper called Assabeel but they are free to publish any news. On the other hand people do feel that the government control its own media outlets, such as Al Rai and Dustour newspapers, to ensure they are aligned with the government's views."

(Female, 21, Student, Aqaba)

Figure 23. To what extent do you agree that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press?



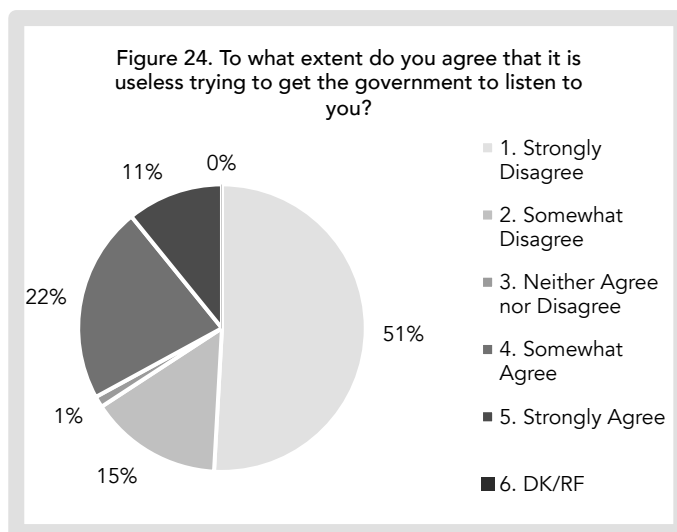
¹³⁵ Freedom House, 2015. 'Jordan: Freedom of the Press', Freedom House, 2015.

5.0 PSYCHOSOCIAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

5.1 LOCUS OF CONTROL

Neither the local nor central administrations are seen as responsive to the concerns of locals, who consequently have limited faith in the democratic process.

Though the majority of respondents have a generally positive view of the central government, reflecting in particular the effectiveness of the armed forces and security services (see section 4.0 Governance Drivers and Barriers), a significant minority did not feel that either the central or municipal governments are responsive to their needs. Additionally, 33 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that it is useless trying to get the government to listen to them, though 66 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 24). Accounting for the apathy felt among this considerable minority of voters in Aqaba is the perception that locally-elected Members of Parliament (MPs) do not adequately represent their constituents in the national legislature.



Accordingly, they were blamed for not helping to improve conditions, especially with regard to the issue of poverty among locals.¹³⁶ Some were even worried that unless residents feel they have a closer relationship with the state through their elected representatives, there could be some form of violent reaction in Aqaba.¹³⁷ In this regard, 74 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that they do not feel that there is any point in voting as it doesn't change anything, while only 24 percent stated that they 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 25). There was also some criticism of the broader electoral system in Jordan, which several respondents considered to be poorly structured based on the absence of proportional representation, meaning that the number of voters required to elect a single MP could vary considerably. As a result, densely populated urban areas like Amman and Zarqa were thought to be under-represented, though respondents acknowledged that the present system ensured Aqaba is over-represented in the national legislature.

¹³⁶ "We have a high number of educated people. This is something very positive and good. However, if we do not find a solution for poverty, unemployment and marginalization - we have the parliamentary elections on the way in September and with the current laws and systems that we have in the country, this cannot be sorted - these parliamentarians cannot represent the people, and this is a danger, a serious one." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

¹³⁷ "In Aqaba I can't say that there is extremism, or that it is a big issue. There are seeds that could grow into a serious problem and could lead to an explosion - that is due to feeding the extremism ideology, excluding the moderate approach and pressuring people through government policies. No one knows when this explosion could come." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

Dissatisfaction with the electoral system was often linked to concerns that elected local officials are profiting from corrupt practices while hard-working locals did not always earn as much as they felt they deserved. In fact, 44 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the people who work the hardest are never rewarded the most, while 44 percent stated that they 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed with this statement (see Figure 26). A tiny minority of respondents feared that this dissatisfaction could translate into public action. However, it is likely that concerns about demonstrations or other forms of protest potentially disrupting the vital tourist trade will prevent locals taking to the streets to voice their grievances.

"MPs do not accurately represent Jordanian residents, and a simple example to demonstrate this is to ask what is the population of Amman? Amman has two million residents, but Karak, Mafraq, Tafila and the Bedouins of the North and central part of the state, they have more MP's than Amman even though it is the capital of Jordan. Where is the justice in that? That means in some places in Jordan, every 100,000 people have one representative whereas here, every 100 people have a representative."

(Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

Figure 25. To what extent do you agree that you do not feel that there is a point in voting, as it doesn't change anything?

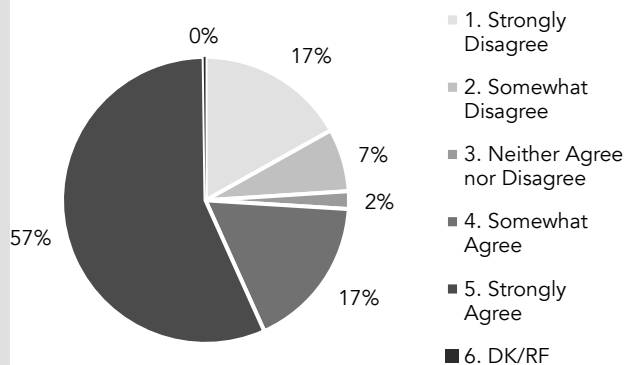
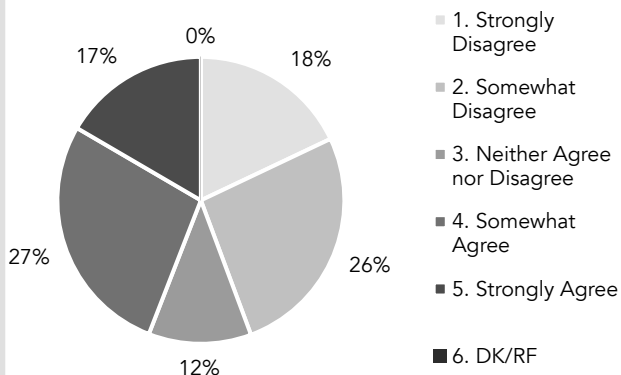
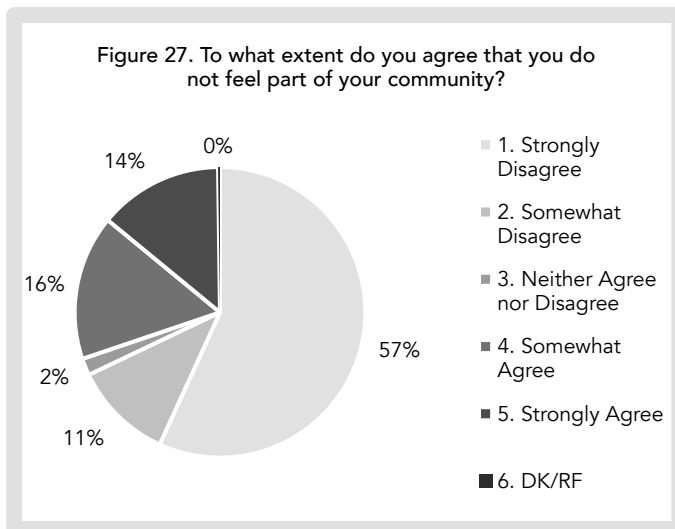


Figure 26. To what extent do you agree that the people who work the hardest are never rewarded the most?



A significant minority feels estranged from their community, which some attribute to frustration over unemployment, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Many respondents were concerned that some locals do not feel a strong connection to their community and to society in general, and that this makes them vulnerable to VEO messaging. Respondents identified poverty and/or unemployment as the main contributing factors to feelings of social dislocation, frustration and hopelessness. These negative psychosocial characteristics were deemed potential drivers of radicalization, ultimately impelling individuals to travel abroad to fight.¹³⁸ The pattern of unemployment leading to despair, radicalization and VEO participation is evident in the case of one young man from Aqaba who joined ISIS in Syria. He was portrayed as a loner



who did not have many friends and did not engage with his peers and teachers.¹³⁹ This individual was an orphan and lived at one of the centers run by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), SOS Children's Villages International, in Aqaba City. Some speculated that his orphan status heightened his risk of radicalization as he lacked a family structure to anchor him in society. Quantitative findings showed that a significant minority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 30 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that they do not feel part of their community, though 68 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 27). Male youths were thought by the majority of respondents to be the social group most likely to feel distant from their community, and they were also believed to be the segment of society most likely to suffer from social issues including drug abuse and alcoholism. The latter may be an exceptional risk in Aqaba, which as a designated Special Economic Area has lower alcohol taxes than the rest in Jordan, making it more affordable for locals. There is a significant possibility then, that a combination of estrangement from society and other factors like unemployment and substance abuse could prompt male youths to seek alternative routes to fulfillment. This applies especially to youths in their late teens and early twenties, who are less likely to be married and have dependents. However, while in isolated cases social estrangement may have led locals to join VEOs, it has not thus far translated into more than a handful VEO recruits. Even in these cases, other factors including a sense of religious duty to perform jihad may also have been instrumental.

"I know of one guy who joined an extremist group. I don't know him really well because when I

¹³⁸ "Poverty and unemployment also have a big role, when someone feels that he has no use in society, he will tend to join these groups." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹³⁹ "The guy that joined ISIS was very anti-social and many people tried to help him but he was always alone and very strange. He always felt that people owed him and he was never grateful. He thought that people helped him because they wanted to feel good about themselves and not because they wanted to help him." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

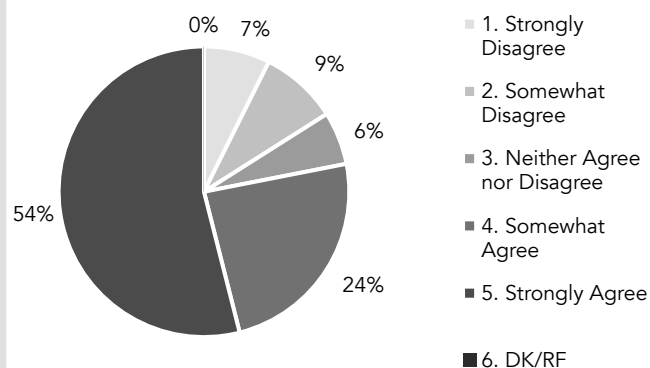
joined the orphanage as a volunteer he was already gone. But I know about him. At first he was an introvert and anti-social and always feeling depressed. Maybe he also felt hatred toward his society because of his situation. You know such people may hate their community because of their situation and they question the reason why they were born with no parents looking after them, so its easier to attract them to radical groups."

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

Bored youths are seen as a significant problem in Aqaba, but the central government and local youth organizations are active in addressing this issue.

The vast majority of respondents saw bored youths as a leading issue in their community. They singled out youths as more vulnerable to VE messaging than older locals,¹⁴⁰ and claimed that as less active citizens they are more likely to be targeted by VEOs for recruitment than are older locals.¹⁴¹ In fact, 78 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that bored youths is a problem in their community, while 16 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 28). Unemployment and poverty were seen as key contributing factors to youth idleness,¹⁴² and were linked to social issues like drug and alcohol abuse.¹⁴³ Prolonged spells of inactivity can also contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair that in turn increase youth susceptibility to VEO participation. Some respondents speculated that chronic inactivity could also contribute to suicidal tendencies. Young people are likely to be conscious of the fact that Islam forbids suicide, but VEO participation offers the alternative lure of 'martyrdom', and a supposed place in heaven for those who are determined to sacrifice their own lives.¹⁴⁴ Despite concerns about under-employed and under-stimulated

Figure 28. To what extent do you agree that lots of bored youths is a problem in your community?



¹⁴⁰ "Violent extremism is an international and regional problem, it's not just a local Jordanian problem because Jordan is an integral part of the region. The reality is that we need to protect ourselves from the extremist terrorist groups that target our youths and mislead them." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁴¹ "Extremism currently exists among the youth in our area since some of the young people do not have opportunities and are not involved in their local communities." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁴² "The main problems facing youths here are unemployment, poverty and having too much free time." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁴³ "Why would they turn to drug and alcohol abuse? They want self-realization, they want to escape through alcohol and drugs - escape the injustices, economic hardships, poverty and oppression they're subjected to, and their inferiority and deprivation of rights." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

¹⁴⁴ "I think some people join groups because they are going to commit suicide. Maybe they have psychological issues and they feel unloved." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

youths, respondents acknowledged that the authorities are actively addressing the issue of bored young people in Aqaba. This is not least through the Jordan Higher Council for Youth, run by the Ministry of Youth, which oversees six youth centers and two recreational camps for youths in the governorate.¹⁴⁵

Respondents often cited the number of dedicated youth clubs in the governorate as evidence of government engagement with youths.¹⁴⁶ This includes the Princess Basma Community Center, the Noor Al Hussein Institution and the Jordan River Foundation in Aqaba city.¹⁴⁷ The Princess Basma Community Center plays a leading role in youth engagement within the governorate. It receives funding from the Hashemite Fund for Human Development and has its main local branch in Aqaba City, as well as satellite centers serving the rural areas in villages including Al Quweira, Al Disah, Al Rishah, Al Hamimah, and Dabbat Hanout. Some respondents also highlighted that Aqaba has a number of youth initiatives playing an important role in occupying youths and preparing them for professional life. For instance, there are summer camps organized by the local youth council in cooperation with the JAF, police and civil defense forces,¹⁴⁸ in addition to a program of activities specifically tailored to female youths called the 'Eyes of Jordan'.¹⁴⁹ Run by the Princess Basma Community Center in Aqaba City, the program's primary objective is to train female members of the police, though it also organizes political participation workshops. One respondent, a youth worker, thought that such initiatives play an important role in preventing youth radicalization, and stated that there is no evidence of any extremist inclinations whatsoever in young people between the ages of 12 and 17 in Aqaba.¹⁵⁰ She also argued that the central government is behaving in a proactive manner to engage with all youths in the governorate through the All Jordan Youth Committee.¹⁵¹ The latter is a body set up in 2006 by the King Abdullah II Fund for Development

¹⁴⁵ "King Hussein Camp has a capacity of 90 youths and the Aqaba Youth House has a capacity of 80 youths. Both are fully equipped to host groups of youths for events and programs in the governorate." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁴⁶ "We have centers that work with youths and steer them away from radicalism. I work on raising awareness among the youth and teaching them to use dialogue to engage with issues and this definitely makes them more aware and stops them joining radical groups." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁴⁷ "We have 500 youths volunteering with the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center in Aqaba, one in the main city of Aqaba and six other centers here in the villages - so a total of seven centers. All centers are linked to the main center here in Aqaba and we all work together and we have monthly plans." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁴⁸ "In Aqaba, a population of 100,000 has at least five local community institutions and the army and police support them. But in Irbid for example, in the Bani Kenanah district, there are 200,000 people and not one civil society institute. These institutes should exist in order to support the youth." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁴⁹ "Our Youth Council in Aqaba teaches youths to behave well. Activities are organized with the security authorities including summer activity camps with the army, camps with the civil defense and camps with public security and "friends of the police". These activities also target young females through a program called the Eyes of Jordan." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁵⁰ "The majority of young people we are dealing with at our centers are between 12-17 years old. We have never encountered anyone with extremist thoughts or a bizarre behavior or religious extremism within the age group of 12-17 years old." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁵¹ "My colleague is very familiar with All Jordan Youth Committee in Aqaba because he is a member of the youth working with the Committee. We had a 2016-2018 national strategy that we will soon work on, God willing. The strategy's programs are to fight extremism and radicalism through involving young people in positive programs that enhance their positive character." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

with the aim of involving youths in voluntary community projects and encouraging youth political engagement.¹⁵² Consequently, while youth boredom is undoubtedly an issue for locals in Aqaba, the governorate seems better equipped than others in Jordan to deal with this problem, and to prevent youths from becoming radicalized out of frustration at their inactivity.

"Youths in Aqaba do not have any political orientation or sympathy for any groups. The youths I meet are at a stage where they want to develop themselves to enhance their leadership skills and their positive features. They want to improve their skills and use them to become an employee. This is why I think Aqaba doesn't have terrorism. Instead we have many youth centers. There is a lot of support for youths, and support for youth initiatives that guide and help young people."

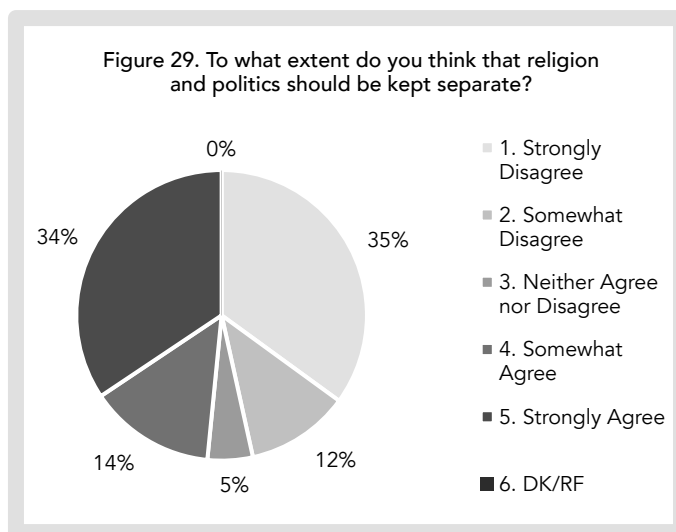
(Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁵² Freij, Muath 2014. 'All Jordan Youth Commission reaching out to Badia, governorates', Jordan Times, January 19, 2014. Information on King Abdullah II Fund for Development available at: < www.kafd.jo >

5.2 RELIGIOUS VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

While many think religion should play a role in politics, most believe Muslims and non-Muslims should interact and that religion is a personal choice.

Many locals in Aqaba are observant Muslims and believe that religion should play a role in the way they are governed. In this regard, 47 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that religion and politics should be kept separate, while 48 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 29). Despite this near-even split, sectarianism between Muslim and non-Muslim residents of Aqaba is not pronounced among respondents. Indeed, the small Christian community attracted praise for its positive interaction with local Muslims, specifically for helping fasting Muslims during Ramadan.¹⁵³ Quantitative findings reinforced the impression of openness between religions, as 84 percent



of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Muslims should avoid mixing with non-Muslims, while a minority of 13 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 30). The vast majority of respondents stated that interaction between different religious groups and communities is not only a positive thing but that it should be encouraged, and some thought deliberate segregation and sectarianism made locals more vulnerable to VE messaging.¹⁵⁴ However, anti-Shia sentiment is widespread in Aqaba, and is often linked to the perception that Sunni Muslims are suffering at the hands of Shias in Iraq and Syria, generally as part of an Iranian-inspired and supported campaign. Nonetheless, most respondents still thought people should be able to practice any religion they wish: 92 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose, and only five percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 31). This was usually stated with reference to Christians, and some respondents gave examples of religious tolerance toward Christians from Islamic history, emphasizing their freedom of worship.¹⁵⁵ In general, respondents made clear that Aqaba does not suffer from religious intolerance, and while a large proportion believed

¹⁵³ "We have Muslims and Christians living with us here and there is no problem. Christians even volunteer to help us in Ramadan because we are fasting". (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁵⁴ "Not accepting others is what enforces extremism." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹⁵⁵ "The prophet never said to kill people because they don't believe in him or hurt people. The Caliph Omar never prayed in a church because he didn't want people to destroy it because he prayed in it. He wanted to preserve their churches for them. So who are you to kill people and blow up churches? Everyone follows his or her own religion. We should have freedom of expression. I wouldn't force people to believe what I believe in." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

that Islam should have a role in politics, they emphasized that this should not be to the detriment of other religions within Jordan.

"The prophet never said to kill people because they don't believe in him or hurt people. The Caliph Omar never prayed in a church because he didn't want people to destroy it because he prayed in it. He wanted to preserve their churches for them. So who are you to kill people and blow up churches? Everyone follows their own religion. We should have freedom of expression. I wouldn't force people to believe what I believe in."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

Figure 30. To what extent do you think that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims?

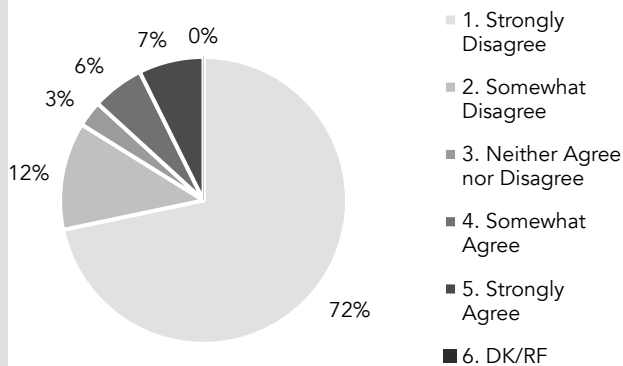
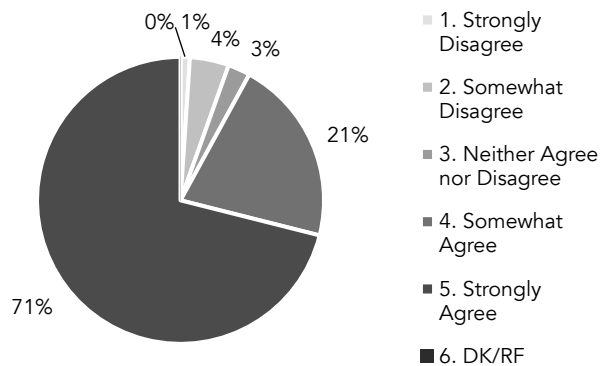


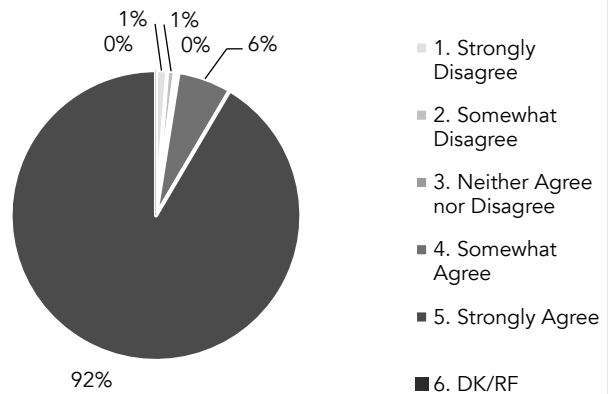
Figure 31. To what extent do you think that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose?



Most locals do not believe Islam can be used to justify killing, and reject the claims to religious legitimacy of VEOs that employ violent methods such as execution.

The vast majority of respondents in Aqaba stated emphatically that they do not believe Islam is a religion that permits or endorses murder – a key aspect of VEO ideologies (like that of ISIS) that has been used to justify the execution of alleged spies, homosexuals, journalists and members of the Syrian and Iraqi armed forces, not to mention Moath Al Kasasbeh. Quantitative findings on this subject

Figure 32. To what extent do you think that Islam does not allow the killing of other people?



were near unanimous, as 98 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Islam does not allow the killing of other people, while only two percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 32). While several respondents acknowledged that there may be a minority of people in their community who believe that in certain circumstances – jihad in particular – it is acceptable to kill, they considered this to stem from a misunderstanding of the concept of jihad.¹⁵⁶ Respondents also frequently referenced VEOs including ISIS and JN when commenting on the relationship between Islam and killing, and used the behavior of VEOs as an example of how Islamic law is misapplied.¹⁵⁷ Overall, respondents in Aqaba have been deeply offended and in many cases disgusted by the more brutal behavior of VEOs, and indicated that it is unlikely that VEO propaganda will appeal to more than a fraction of the population so long it continues to depict extreme violence, even when VEOs attempt to justify this with religious arguments.

"Maybe one or two will say he is a "Mujahid", but the majority will say he is a radical because as I said, people here are well aware and well-informed, and they know that this is not Islam. And in no religion is it permitted to kill people. What sin has this person committed, whether he was Christian or Muslim?"

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

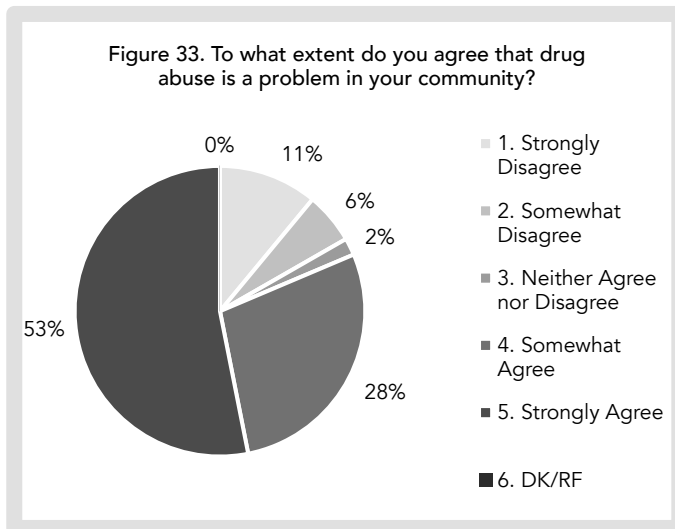
¹⁵⁶ "The meaning of jihad is to fight injustice while using the name of God to oppose injustice." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

¹⁵⁷ "If ISIS [members] were Sunnis, then they wouldn't have disagreed with the people of Anbar since Anbar is the largest province in Iraq and is full of Sunnis. They should not be seen as Sunnis. How can a Sunni kill his Muslim brother? A Muslim doesn't kill an entire nation. If they were Sunnis, they would never have killed any of the Muslim Brotherhood that existed in Syria. No, they are not Sunnis." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

5.3 EXPOSURE TO CRIME AND CONFLICT

Drugs are seen as a leading social issue in Aqaba, especially among the youth population.

The availability of drugs, drug abuse and addiction are leading social issues in Aqaba, especially among youths. This is despite the existence of social programs aimed at educating young people about the dangers of drugs,¹⁵⁸ and a government crackdown on drug dealing in 2016 that has seen some drug dealers arrested.¹⁵⁹ 81 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that drug abuse is a problem in their community, while 17 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 33). Respondents were concerned that not only is excessive use of drugs like the amphetamine Captagon and hashish making young people in



Aqaba idle and lethargic, but also that it is rendering them more vulnerable to VEO recruitment.¹⁶⁰ For example, drug users were thought to be especially likely to be unemployed and/or unable to work, making them exceptionally receptive to the prospect of high salaries that some respondents believed VEOs offer to their members. Some respondents also saw addiction as inhibitive to the natural maturity of youth associated with employment or starting a family, meaning drug-dependent youths had fewer barriers to joining a VEO if approached. There are some institutions that attempt to educate locals, especially children and youths, about the danger of drugs. One example is the Children's Library, founded in 1996 as a venue for cultural activities and educational awareness campaigns, one of which aims to reduce drug use.

"Imagine someone who is 22 years old, and he is on drugs, and he goes and begs for money, and buys alcohol and hashish with it, so how can he have any responsibility? Of course this person is easily dragged in by extremist groups and recruited."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

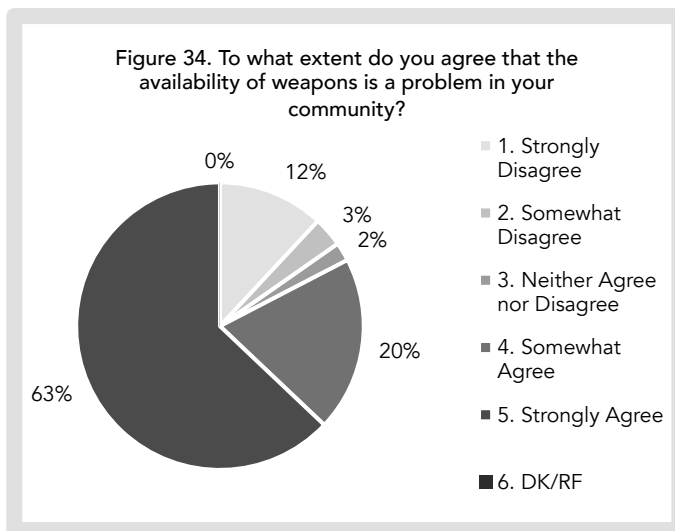
¹⁵⁸ "There are community programs for youths to raise awareness about drugs and they are free to join." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁵⁹ "Many people are involved in stopping drugs coming to Aqaba. They check for everything and they put a checkpoint after the Aqaba customs and they put one on the South Beach. We are protected now and they caught many people who were dealing drugs. They sell Captagon, hashish and other things." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁶⁰ "All these youngsters take drugs, and they could be easily addicted, and when they take drugs they are like zombies and can be easily manipulated." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

There are concerns over the widespread availability of weapons in Aqaba, though they are mainly seen at traditional weddings.

The presence of weapons in private hands in the governorate was a concern for a majority of respondents, as 83 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the availability of weapons is a problem in their community, while only 15 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 34). Many referenced the local tradition of firing weapons into the air to celebrate a marriage as one of the main issues associated with local gun ownership, as this can cause accidental injuries and deaths. However, most agreed that this problem has been addressed by the government, which passed a law in 2010 making it illegal to fire weapons in the air at celebrations. Accordingly, respondents claimed that it is much rarer to see this activity occur now than it was in the past. The Public Security Directorate is responsible for enforcing the law against using guns at weddings. Officials stated that they attend ceremonies across Jordan, handing out cards to remind the organizers and guests that so-called "festive firing" is illegal, and that a violation of the law can result in the groom being arrested along with those responsible for selling the weapons and/or ammunition to guests.¹⁶¹



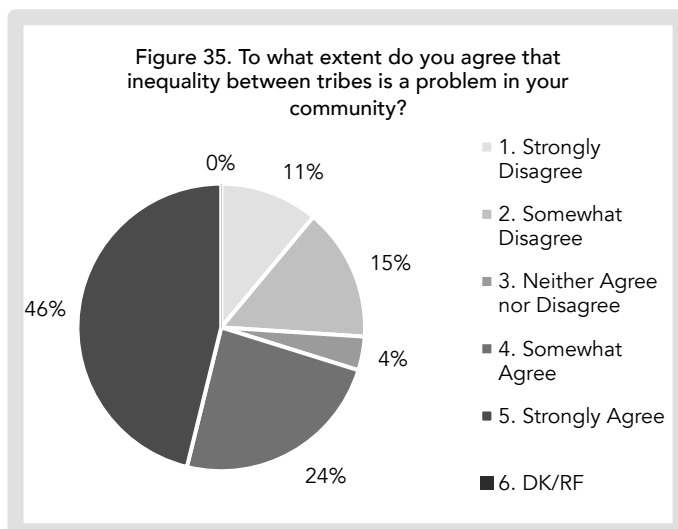
"There were problems with weapons, for example the firing of guns at weddings, but now in Aqaba this is not a problem, because the government banned it and they started awareness campaigns with the help of local community institutions. This worked very well so now this issue doesn't exist anymore."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁶¹ Hussein, Rana 2015. '11 weapons seized, several people arrested at weddings over festive firing', Jordan Times, September 06, 2015.

Many respondents complained that there is inequality between the various tribes in Aqaba, which vary in size and influence.

Many locals in Aqaba are members of East Bank tribes,¹⁶² some of which are considered more powerful than others due to their larger size. Respondents identified the Howeitat and Ahyewat as the largest and most influential tribes, while the Yasin tribe is known for the wealth of its members. A number of other tribes represented in Aqaba governorate include the Fayumi and Kabariti.¹⁶³ Some respondents outlined how local inter-tribal and intra-tribal conflicts sometimes escalate into violence.¹⁶⁴ Inter-tribal disputes will usually be resolved through a system of tribal justice outside the conventional legal system, presided over by tribal 'judges'. Such was the case in January 2016, after a member of one leading tribe was accused of harassing a 16-year old girl from another prominent tribe leading a cousin of the girl to open fire on the suspect's house with an assault rifle. The dispute was resolved after the girl's tribe ordered the accused to pay her JD 40,000 in compensation, though they had originally demanded that his tongue be cut out.¹⁶⁵ As certain tribes are considered to be more influential than others, some respondents complained that members of influential tribes benefit unduly.¹⁶⁶ In this regard, 70 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that inequality between tribes is a problem, while 26 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 35).¹⁶⁷ Despite some respondents' reservations, many were complimentary about the role that the tribal system plays in preventing younger tribe members from being influenced by VEO propaganda.



¹⁶² "In Aqaba we have tribalism, but not on the surface." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

¹⁶³ "The biggest tribe here is the Howeitat, who are Bedouin. There is also the Yasin and I think this one is originally from Palestine and they are a big family. There is also the Fayumi, and the Kabariti. There are many different tribes here but the Howeitat is the most powerful tribe because it's the biggest." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁶⁴ "In October 2015 a fight occurred between members of the Ahweyat tribe in Al Shallala neighborhood in Aqaba, south of Jordan. Weapons were used and the police forces had to enter the neighborhood in order to maintain security and order. A young man was shot and moved to a hospital. As to why the fight occurred, it is a continuation of a fight that happened two weeks before this one, where a young man was also shot." (Female, 35, Activist, Aqaba)

¹⁶⁵ Guoussous, Suzanna 2016. 'Tribe of harassed girl wants 40,000 from alleged harasser', Jordan Times, January 30, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ "Some of the tribes are richer than others, like the Yasin - most of them are rich. The Howeitat are not really rich but they have a good relationship with the government and they benefit from that as they can get jobs. But there is not much tension between the tribes and they intermarry all of the time." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁶⁷ "The tribes can support people who do shameful things. For example, if someone killed a man his tribe would automatically support him without any consideration of whether he committed this crime. These things happen and sometimes the tribes compete, and some think that their tribe is better than another's tribe so he can tell them what to do." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

They also thought that the tribal system is a positive force for society because it encourages youths to respect elders. At the same time, it imposes a set of social rules and conventions that reduce the likelihood of tribal members behaving in a disruptive manner.

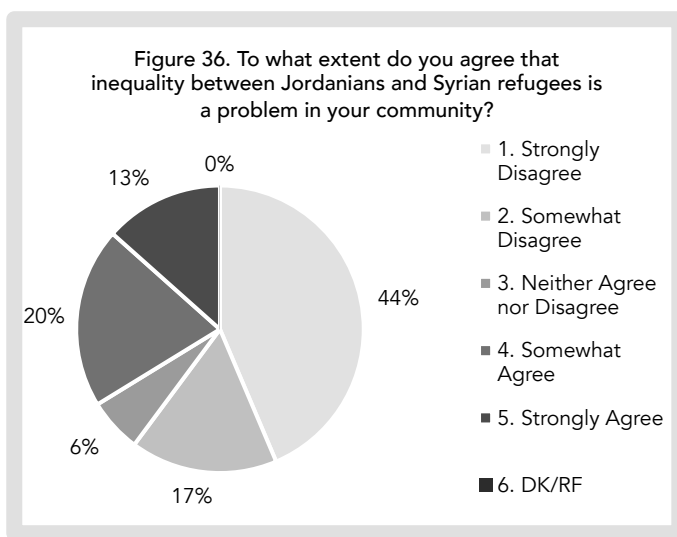
"Tribal affiliations strengthen society because Jordan has a tribal system. We respect our elders, and we spend a lot of time together and all of us abide by the rules and the behavior of our tribe."

(Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

Aqaba has fewer refugees than other governorates, but their presence has caused social friction.

Aqaba is geographically the farthest governorate from the Syrian border and has not experienced an influx of refugees comparable to governorates like Zarqa, Irbid, Amman and Mafrq in the north of Jordan. As of August 2016, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees identified only 3,300 'persons of concern' (meaning refugees) in Aqaba governorate, compared to 135,000 in Irbid and 157,000 in Mafrq.¹⁶⁸ However, some respondents still expressed negative views of refugees from both Syria and Iraq. Though they did not suggest refugees could be involved in terrorism, they did think they are more likely to be involved in criminal activity, which probably reflected local prejudice against outsiders.¹⁶⁹

The majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 61 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that conflict between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem, while 33 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 36). A common complaint against refugees was that they compete with local labor and undercut wages. But given the relatively low number of refugees it is likely that these concerns are overstated. Some respondents emphasized the similarity of culture and religious beliefs between Syrians and Jordanians,¹⁷⁰ suggesting that Syrian refugees will



¹⁶⁸ UNHCR, 2016. 'Syria Regional Refugee Response'. Accessed August 02, 2016.

¹⁶⁹ "I am not linking extremism with Syrians, but I believe that the presence of Syrians or Iraqis or other nationalities that have recently entered Jordan has destabilized the country because it has made people afraid. Praise the Lord our security is good but people are afraid of outsiders that have entered the country. I am not saying that they have been responsible for terrorism because the majority of the issues with foreigners are criminal rather than terrorist." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁷⁰ "We received 1.5 million of our Syrian brothers who fled a war zone - this has an impact, not necessarily negative in the long run. Of course, adaptation takes time; these people relocated to another country, they need time to

become socially integrated in time. Respondents also observed that locals sympathize with the plight of Syrian refugees and often support them by providing food and clothing,¹⁷¹ indicating that there is ultimately a sense of solidarity between the two communities.

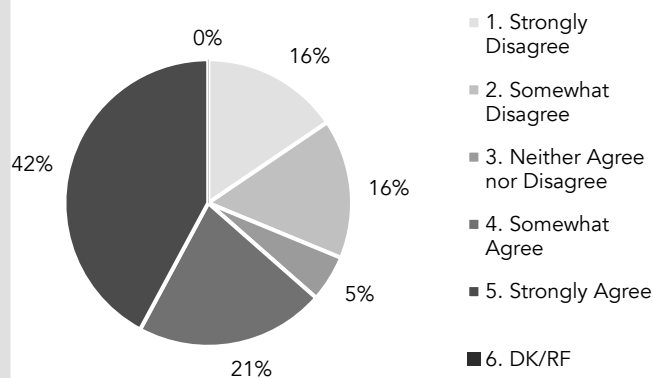
"The Syrian conflict also affected Aqaba. We have 12,000 Syrians in the area and prices are now higher and these people are renting houses so the cost of rent is getting higher. Syrian refugees also work here and they take lower salaries than Jordanians, so many business owners prefer to hire Syrians. This makes local people feel jealous. At the beginning, Jordanians didn't want to work with them but eventually they got used to working with Syrians. Another problem is that all the money and support from charities goes to Syrians while Jordanians used to benefit from this."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

There is thought to be inequality between East and West Bank residents in Aqaba.

Many respondents observed that a significant proportion of Aqaba's population is of West Bank extraction.¹⁷² Many of these individuals maintain ties with families living in the Palestinian Territories, some of whom have dual nationality and regularly come to visit relatives in Aqaba. Despite widespread sympathy for the Palestinian cause and opposition to Israel, many respondents believed that East Bank locals are often favored when government jobs are allocated, which could cause resentment between the two groups. Indeed, 63 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem, while 32 percent reported that they 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 37).

Figure 37. To what extent do you agree that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem in your community?



"There are many people that come to Jordan from Palestine, because some of them have dual nationality and most of their family live here in Jordan and have Jordanian nationality. They come to visit each other once or twice a year."

(Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

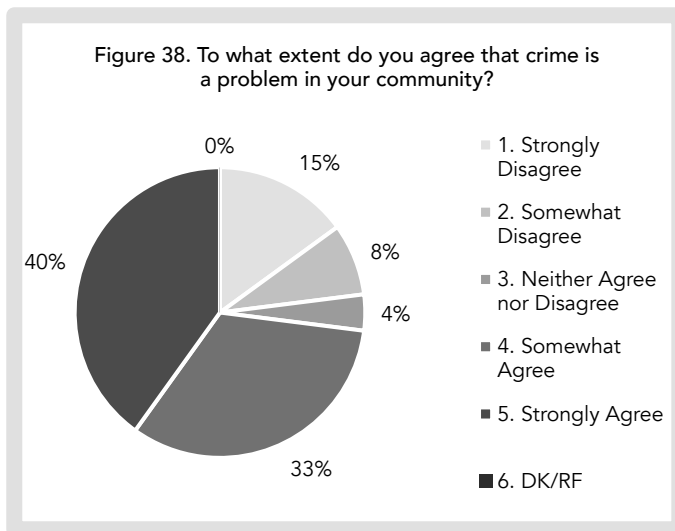
integrate within the society. However, I don't think it will take a very long time, as we are Arab, have the same religion and very similar traditions." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

¹⁷¹ "Everyone here helps the Syrians and visits them and gives them basic necessities. But Jordan as a country can only handle so much." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁷² "I would even say that half of the population here in Aqaba City are from West Bank families." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

The majority of respondents in Aqaba see crime as a problem, and they are more likely to have suffered from crime than inhabitants of other governorates in Jordan.

The police in Aqaba were well-regarded by the majority of respondents, and were felt to be effective in opposing VEOs as part of the broader security apparatus. However, Aqaba was still thought to suffer from excessive levels of crime: 73 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that crime is a problem, while only 23 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 38). Respondents in Aqaba were much more concerned about crime than those in neighboring Tafiela (47 percent of respondents agreed that crime is a problem) or Karak (42 percent). Despite these differences, only 21 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents stated that they or their family had suffered from crime, while 79 percent claimed they had not (see Figure 39). Some respondents blamed tourists – especially those from neighboring KSA – for causing disturbances. In the case of visiting Saudis, this is generally alcohol-related and often takes place in or around the bars near the waterfront in the center of Aqaba City. However, respondents were complimentary of the police, who were reported to respond promptly when required, and were said to be polite and professional in their conduct.¹⁷³



"The problem is that there are Saudi people coming from over the border. The gasoline there is really cheap so you can fill your car for 2.5 JD. Then they will come here to Jordan with a full tank from Saudi, sell the gasoline and they will have money. They will spend it in bars drinking alcohol. They will look at the girls and make trouble, then they will go back to Saudi. This is a common problem we have."

(Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁷³ "The police in Aqaba have a good reputation. They respond quickly to any calls. In case of a robbery or a fight, in five minutes the police will arrive. At the police station, the treatment is good, and no citizen is ever insulted in any way." (Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

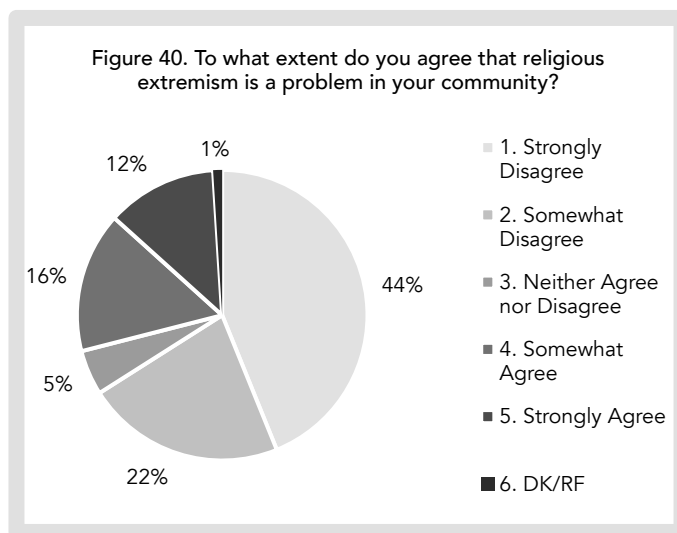
Figure 39. Have you or your family directly suffered from crime?



5.4 EXPOSURE TO VE AND PERCEPTIONS OF VEO THREAT

Religious extremism is not considered a significant problem in Aqaba, though respondents believed it is a national issue.

66 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that religious extremism is a problem in their community, while a minority of 28 percent said that they ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 40). Some respondents contrasted their governorate with other areas of Jordan that were thought to suffer from radicalization and extremism, such as East Amman, Ma’an and Zarqa.¹⁷⁴ Several also expressed concerns that religious extremism is growing in Jordan as a whole and thus hoped the central government would be able to control it.¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile, some cited the absence of large-scale attacks since the 2005 Amman hotel bombings as evidence that religious extremism is diminishing in the country.¹⁷⁶



Where respondents referenced the few instances where locals – exclusively youths – have decided to join VEOs, in most cases they did not attribute the decision solely to religious extremism or heightened religiosity.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, religion was sometimes seen as a secondary factor in VEO participation, with upbringing and social satisfaction levels judged to be more influential in driving VEO membership. However, in at least one case, a local who fought for a VEO in Syria was motivated by a desire to participate in jihad and to achieve martyrdom and reach heaven.¹⁷⁸ Many respondents stated that the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has played a key role in

¹⁷⁴ “I cannot tell you for sure if there are sleeper cells in Jordan or not, but I know that there are many areas that contain Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Zarqa, East Amman, Ma’an and the refugee camps. These areas are the poorest and the most ignorant – the percentage of educated people is very low – that’s why they are more prone to becoming extremists.” (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹⁷⁵ “Extremism in Jordan is increasing, for example in universities we see Islamist students spreading extremist thought.” (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹⁷⁶ “I don’t see extremism or terrorism as an issue in Jordan. There are criminal issues like robberies, corruption, violence between tribes, and violence in universities, and this is what we hear about rather than terrorist attacks. Praise the Lord, we haven’t heard of anything similar since the bombings that happened in 2005 because our security system is being constantly strengthened in order to eliminate extremism and terrorism.” (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁷⁷ “I don’t think that he chose ISIS, I think he was waiting for a reason to get out and when someone approached him he went for it. I don’t think that religion was behind his decision because he wasn’t religious.” (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

¹⁷⁸ “I personally know a person from Aqaba who joined a radical group. He was educated and unmarried. Right now he is in Syria, is married and he has children. According to what he said, he went to Syria to do jihad.” (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

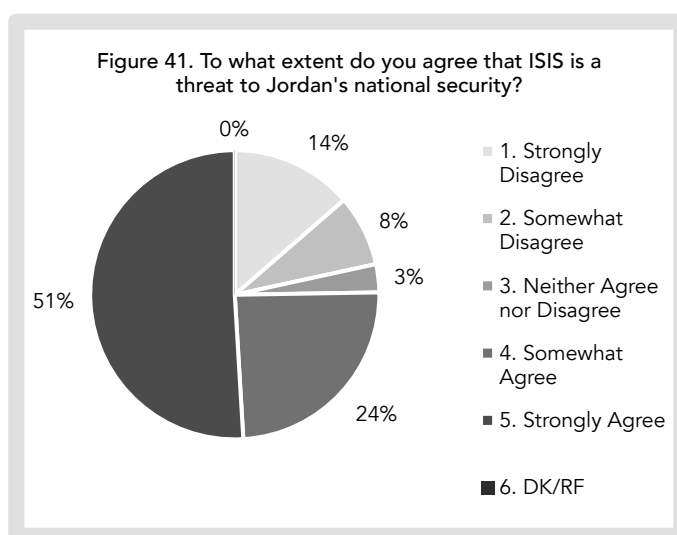
preventing the spread of religious extremism in Aqaba. It has reportedly been successful in connecting with youths through workshops and competitions, as well as educating imams in local mosques to ensure that they do not promote religious extremism in their sermons or prayer meetings.

"The Awqaf have been working on the topic of extremism for four years, since it first appeared. They give workshops and they do competitions and cultural and even poetry sessions. They pose questions such as: 'How do you deal with an extremist you might meet?'...'How can you go and report them? What are the things you should report? What is the correct number to call and what is the procedure you might take so that the security forces can reach this person?' All of this makes it easier for people to stop extremists."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

ISIS is not considered a threat to security in the governorate, but respondents are concerned that it may seek to carry out attacks in the rest of Jordan.

ISIS is not considered a serious threat in Aqaba, and is believed to have few sympathizers and zero active members within the governorate. Respondents also thought that ISIS-orchestrated terrorist attacks are unlikely in Aqaba. However, some expressed fears that ISIS wishes to recruit Jordanians and establish a base in Jordan, which would allow the VEO to carry out attacks within the country.¹⁷⁹ In fact, 75 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that ISIS is a threat to Jordan's national security, while only 22 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 41). Despite widespread concerns about ISIS infiltrating the rest of the country, respondents



identified a number of barriers to an ISIS presence in Aqaba governorate. This includes the fact that many locals are members of East Bank tribes with tight social and familial networks.¹⁸⁰ Tribal groups were also seen as supportive of the Royal Court and central government, and naturally opposed to ISIS. Furthermore, individuals from East Bank tribal groups who otherwise might be vulnerable to VE messaging were considered less likely to become radicalized without attracting the attention of tribal relatives, who would probably act to prevent their involvement with VEOs. The significant presence of members from the police, JAF and GID due to Aqaba's proximity to the Israeli border, was also given as a factor limiting ISIS's ability to build a presence in the governorate. In terms of ease of access, traffic into Aqaba is subject to vehicle searches and document checks for passengers traveling via the main road

¹⁷⁹ "ISIS is threatening national security, and everyone is afraid of it" (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁸⁰ "Tribal affiliation affects behavior as well because I think that ISIS will not approach someone from a well-known tribe because they have strong ties together. They ultimately prioritize their tribe." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

through the valley of Wadi Araba. This makes it harder for potential terrorists to bring the weapons and/or explosives necessary to carry out an attack inside the governorate.

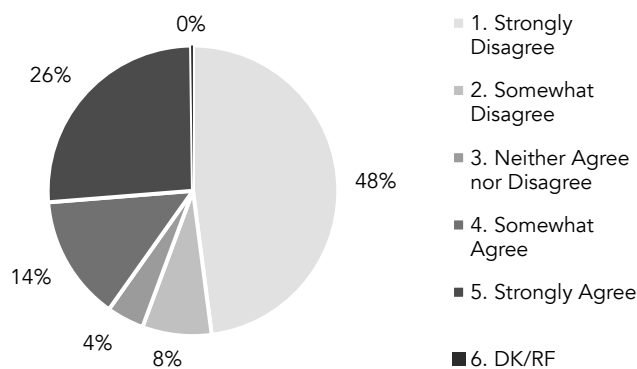
"Security here is pretty tight and we have Wadi Araba valley, which is very well monitored by the government security forces. This really helps the government arrest people who might be radical or want to commit terrorist acts. But in Irbid and Jarash it's not the same. Anyone can enter these cities easily."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

Respondents strongly criticized martyrdom celebrations for dead VEO fighters, though such events are uncommon in Aqaba.

Though few, if any, so-called "martyrs weddings" have taken place in Aqaba, they were nonetheless referred to by a number of respondents.¹⁸¹ These events, which are funerals for deceased VEO fighters, were almost exclusively portrayed in a negative light and most respondents did not think they should be permitted to take place. However, some accepted that it is normal for the families of dead VEO members in Jordan to wish honor on their dead relative. The majority of respondents also did not believe that such celebrations should be seen as endorsing the VEO participation of young, male Jordanians. Rather, they claimed that those who attend do so to show their sympathy with the family of the deceased in a culturally appropriate manner.¹⁸² These gatherings were sometimes presented as conventional funerals that would have taken place even had the deceased not been killed while fighting for a VEO, and they were not thought to indicate that those attending endorsed VEOs or VEO participation.¹⁸³ In fact, VEO participation is considered extremely

Figure 42. To what extent do you agree that it is better to die in revenge than live on in shame?



¹⁸¹ "After my friend from Amman died in Syria, his family opened a funeral house and called it a "martyr's wedding". I didn't go to pay condolences." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

¹⁸² "Everyone, even the Jordanians that died as martyrs with ISIS, had condolence houses. People were sorry for their end, and even if they disagreed with what they did they assumed he meant well. This is human; I wouldn't blame the family for receiving condolences because they lost their son twice – when he left and when he died." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

¹⁸³ "Offering condolences doesn't mean that you agree with what this person used to be; you offer support and sympathy for his death. Even if he was trouble when he was alive, that's not what you are there to talk about or agree with. In Islam, even if someone has been killed, when he dies you should offer condolences. That doesn't mean that you agree with his actions. I believe Riba (usury) is Haram. But if someone that took interest died, if he worked at a bank, you [still] offer condolences. It doesn't mean I offer blessings for what he did while alive." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

unpopular in Aqaba.¹⁸⁴ Accordingly, some respondents thought it unlikely that, with at least one exception,¹⁸⁵ most families of ‘martyrs’ endorse the actions of the deceased.¹⁸⁶ Meanwhile, several respondents suggested that VEO participation could be linked to local concepts of honor and shame, with the persecution of Syrian civilians considered an attack on all Sunni Muslims. This would imply that most locals would respect those who went to fight in Syria. However, there was limited support for this line of reasoning, and the majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 56 percent, ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that it is better to die in revenge than live on in shame, while 40 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see figure 42).

“96 percent of people in Jordan will not accept this kind of behavior and would not feel sorry for him. The boy who left us and went to Syria to join ISIS, everyone here says they don’t care about what will happen to him. Do we have people here in Jordan who celebrate someone’s death and call him a martyr here? I don’t know any of this. Abu Musab’s case is different. He is not like all the other boys who went there. I don’t know if he is radical or not. I have not heard of any celebrations for dead fighters here in Jordan. Maybe in such cases the parents don’t even see their son as a martyr but they say he is.”

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

The majority believes VEO members should be jailed if they return to Jordan, though a sizeable minority argues it is possible to re-integrate them into society.

It was generally held that most Jordanians who have traveled to Syria or Iraq to join VEOs would not return. But even if they should so desire, the majority of respondents was not in favor of allowing them to do so.¹⁸⁷ Former VEO members are often considered terrorists,¹⁸⁸ and incarcerating such individuals was seen by a significant minority as a necessary step to prevent their orchestrating attacks within Jordan – either individually or in groups. In fact, 55 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that returned fighters should be imprisoned, while 38 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 43). Of those who disagreed, several referred to successfully re-integrated Jordanian former ‘mujahedeen’ who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980’s and 1990’s as proof that a re-integration program would be successful for former VEO members.¹⁸⁹ This perspective is supported by the example of at least

¹⁸⁴ “People here in Aqaba think those who went to fight abroad are fools. They said that my friend who went to fight was stupid, and that he was lost.” (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁸⁵ “This guy from Aqaba who is fighting in Syria, his routine is that he goes out and fights for a week, and then stays at home for a week. His mother is happy because her son is going to be a martyr.” (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

¹⁸⁶ “If I was responsible for my son and he left to join a group, of course I will blame myself. My son is my project – this would mean that I failed in caring for him, directing him to the right path.” (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

¹⁸⁷ “I believe from the attacks that are currently in Syria, a mere 500 or 100 or 50 people will come back. Most people that go there don’t come back.” (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

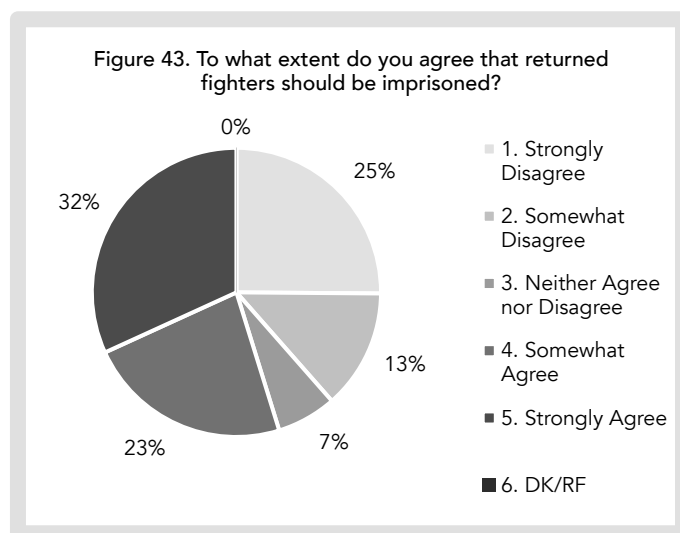
¹⁸⁸ “They say Jordanians who fight abroad are terrorists in Aqaba and everywhere else. I don’t think they say that this person went for jihad, because they kill civilians” (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

¹⁸⁹ “We were able to take care of the Jordanians who came back from Afghanistan after fighting there. We have a wise leadership that can handle the situation with whoever is coming back from Syria. I am sure that our leadership will treat them based on the idea that they were misguided, and put them in psychological rehabilitating programs to

one local who spent time in Syria with JN and subsequently returned to Aqaba. Upon returning, he was able to rejoin society after a brief period of incarceration.¹⁹⁰ However, in the case of another local who was believed to be a member of ISIS in Syria in July 2016, respondents stated that he is viewed with such hostility that it is unlikely he would be tolerated as a free member of the community were he ever to return. It is probable then, that while it may be possible for returned fighters to rejoin society in Aqaba, many locals would view them with suspicion and fear. This could consequently marginalize them and leave them vulnerable to re-radicalization by the very VEOs they used to fight for.

"If extremism ends in Syria, this might cause these extremists to go back to Jordan, Syria or Iraq. And we always talked about this when Jordan opened its borders with Syria. If these extremists come back to Jordan, this might lead to many organized or individual terrorist operations."

(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)



make sure that they can merge back with the society. As I said, whoever came back from Afghanistan was merged back in the society and now they are productive individuals in the society." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

¹⁹⁰ "This young man from Aqaba he joined Jabhat Al Nusra. He used to study something related to medicine. He joined Jabhat Al Nusra and stayed with them for a year. After that he came back and he was arrested for less than a month, and then he was released." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

6.0 EXTERNAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

6.1 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

The US is believed to have a negative effect on Jordan, mainly due to the wider impact of its foreign policy in the region.

Many locals dislike the US because it is closely associated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which locals believe is encouraging the central government to privatize state-owned and state-run assets in Aqaba, especially the port.¹⁹¹ Locals were reportedly concerned that privatization could lead to job losses and a deterioration in working conditions, with one respondent estimating that there have been up to 200 protests by port workers since 2011.¹⁹² Respondents also frequently criticized the US for its foreign policy in the region, especially the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Many blamed this event for a sharp increase in regional (including in Jordan) radicalization, as Iraq's post-invasion instability made it a base for VEOs.¹⁹³ The breakdown in Iraq's internal stability following the US invasion was also an economic blow to Jordan, as Iraq was one of its major trade partners. Meanwhile, the US attracted general criticism for the suffering it is thought to have caused the Iraqi people by destabilizing the country.¹⁹⁴ It was also accused of having created the problem of VEOs including JN and ISIS by nurturing their ideological forebear, AQ, as a proxy in the war against the USSR,¹⁹⁵ and later against regional regimes including those of Saddam Hussein and Bashar Al Assad. The vast majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 80 percent, thought that the US has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only 11 percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' positive (see Figure 50). Despite a generally negative impression of the US's effect on Jordan, some respondents did acknowledge the close relationship between Jordan and the US, and believed that the US sees Jordan as an important ally in the region.¹⁹⁶ They also saw this relationship as mutually beneficial because, as a poor country, Jordan would be unable to afford the weaponry necessary

¹⁹¹ "People in Aqaba connect the US with the International Monetary Fund, which is pushing the government to take a step towards privatization in Aqaba, and many demonstrations occurred against privatization. It is considered the main reason for an increase in poverty and the port employees held many protests against privatizing the port and to stop the privatization." (Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

¹⁹² "In the last five years more than 200 labor protests have occurred asking for better work conditions and better life conditions." (Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

¹⁹³ "The majority of Jordanian youth studied in Iraq and had many experiences in Iraq. There were very strong economic and social connections between us and Iraq in the days of the late King Hussein, God rest his soul. We got very sad about what happened to Iraq and felt like it was our own nation that had been ruined." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁹⁴ "Did America have mercy on anyone when they occupied Iraq? Did they? Why would I have mercy on them?" (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

¹⁹⁵ "Who created Al Qa'ida? America. Who created Osama Bin Laden to fight the Soviets? America." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁹⁶ "We have to agree that it is not in America's interest to destabilize the system in Jordan." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

to equip its armed forces without the financial assistance of the US.¹⁹⁷ USAID is also known to be funding local initiatives including the Aqaba Community and Economic Development program, which launched a campaign called the Micro-Business Incubator in 2016. This program helps locals set up businesses by offering them a study program focusing on creating business ideas, marketing, and technical and financial training.

"When Al Qa'ida was established, it was sponsored by America in order to fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. And when the Soviet Union fell, America wanted to enter Iraq and Afghanistan to fight and end Al Qa'ida. Wherever there is America, there is Al Qa'ida. Al Qa'ida is American, it was established to destroy all the Arab regimes. It was the reason behind the fall of Saddam Hussein and breaking up Syria and Iraq and Libya."

(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

The EU is thought to have a negative impact on Jordan, which is tied to perceptions of its leading member states.

Respondents' views of the European Union (EU) were closely linked to views of its principal members, notably France and the United Kingdom (UK). As such, the EU attracted criticism for the UK's role in the 2003 Iraq War and its support for US foreign policy more generally in the region. The UK and France were also thought to support the perceived efforts by the IMF to encourage the privatization of Aqaba Port. This is to the anger of locals who equate privatization with job losses. Some also denounced the EU for the supposed anti-Muslim behavior of certain member states. Notable in this respect is the face veil ban in France and the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad, as well as similar Danish cartoons that caused offence. 66 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents believed the EU has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while 25 percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' positive (see Figure 50). Those respondents with a positive view of the EU often cited the financial benefits that European tourists bring to Aqaba's local economy.¹⁹⁸ Some also compared European tourists favorably against their counterparts from Russia and neighboring KSA, who were criticized for either spending less money or drinking excessively and causing trouble. Furthermore, some respondents applauded the manner in which the EU has handled the refugee crisis in recent years.¹⁹⁹

"Some people in Aqaba believe that some countries in the EU, such as Britain and France, support American policies regarding privatization in Aqaba [through the IMF] and other policies that they think do not recognize the potential of the port of Aqaba. They are also against the UK because it supported the US army in invading Iraq." (Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

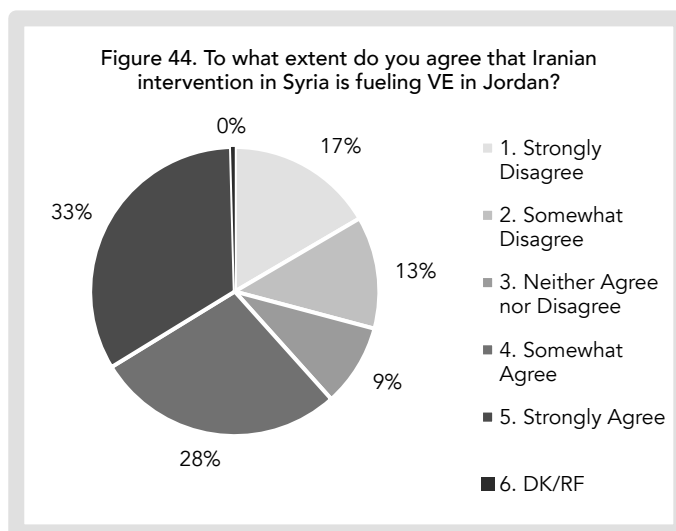
¹⁹⁷ "If Jordan was not in the coalition, no one would collaborate with us. Jordan is a poor country and all of its weapons come from the US and Russia or the UK, and thus they won't support us with arms and weapons if we do not help fight ISIS." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

¹⁹⁸ "People from the EU countries are good, though this year we have not had so many tourists in Aqaba. Maybe the problems around us are affecting us, like in Iraq and Syria and Palestine." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

¹⁹⁹ "I think the EU countries have done a good job handling the refugee crisis. They are doing good things for them and are trying to save them." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

Iran is widely criticized, especially for its foreign policy and perceived interference in the region.

The vast majority of respondents were critical of Iran, especially its foreign policy and its involvement in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, 75 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents judged that Iran has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only four percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' positive (see Figure 50). Where respondents expressed pro-Iran views, they justified them by stating that they saw Iran as a powerful Islamic country in possession of nuclear weapons.²⁰⁰ However, Iran was widely criticized for a foreign policy that is perceived to be sectarian and aimed at disempowering Sunnis. Many respondents also expressed concerns about an ongoing 'Shia expansion' across the region, as Iran and the Shia-led Iraqi government supposedly seek to displace or subjugate Sunnis in western Iraq and Syria.²⁰¹ The involvement of Iranian forces and Iran's proxy militia, Hezbollah, in the Syria conflict is seen within this context, as is Iranian support for the Iraqi campaign against ISIS. Meanwhile, some respondents even accused Iran of funding VEOs in Syria and Iraq. As evidence, they cited the new vehicles jihadists could be seen driving in VEO-produced online videos, which respondents assumed must either have been gifted or funded by an allied foreign power.²⁰² Iran was also thought to be increasing the problem of VE in Jordan amidst the broader context of alarmist sectarian dialogue about Shia expansionism. This is not least because VEOs could potentially capitalize on outrage over Iranian support for the Assad regime as a means to garner support in Aqaba.²⁰³ In fact, 61 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Iranian intervention in Syria is fuelling VE in Jordan, while 30 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 44). Overall, criticism of Iran should not be interpreted as solely reflective of anti-Shia sectarian sentiments. Indeed, quantitative findings revealed that less than a third of Aqaba GQ respondents believed jihad against Shias to be justifiable (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives). Rather, anti-Iran attitudes reflect broader fears relating to Iranian expansionism and an aggressive foreign policy thought to be



²⁰⁰ "I am supportive of Iran, and I see that it is a strong country with great power and nuclear weapons. I am proud of it as an Islamic country, I am not against it." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁰¹ "It is Iran especially that causes all the problems. They aim to kill Sunnis however they can." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

²⁰² "I am surprised to watch videos of extremists in Iraq and see them driving 2016 model cars like 2016 model Toyotas. How are they getting such things and how are they being financed? I don't blame any western countries, I blame Iran and the existing Iraqi government, and I think it finances extremist groups." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²⁰³ "He wanted to defend his sect and he talked about the sectarian war that was happening between Alawites and Sunni. He used to say that Shias are the enemies of the nation." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

targeting Sunnis in the region that could include Jordanians. This is in addition to frustrations stemming from Iran's support for the Assad regime that could strengthen VEOs looking to recruit locals.

"What is happening is the expansion of the Shia Crescent because of the actions of Iran. So some people say maybe we need Daesh in order to remove Bashar and give Syria to this Islamic state to prevent the Shia Crescent taking control. Otherwise, eventually it could even reach Saudi Arabia."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

The majority believes that KSA has a positive impact on Jordan despite complaints that it is fuelling VE in the region, and that Saudi tourists are anti-social.

Aqaba governorate borders KSA, and its socially permissive atmosphere attracts tourists from the Kingdom who benefit the area by generating revenue and creating employment in the tourism industry. However, Saudi tourists – namely men – also drew criticism from respondents for their unruly behavior including excessive alcohol consumption and pugnacity as often witnessed in Aqaba City bars. Beyond the local context, KSA was widely believed to be fuelling the conflict in Syria and encouraging the spread of VE in the region. Moreover, its initial support for Osama Bin Laden was even presented as evidence of its endorsement of AQ. Some respondents also blamed KSA for the rise of VEOs, especially ISIS and JN. Indeed, radical individuals in or from the Kingdom, principally adherents to Wahhabism, were considered complicit in facilitating these groups through financial contributions.²⁰⁴ Despite some vocal detractors, the majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 68 percent, judged that KSA has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan, while only 14 percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' negative (see Figure 50). Consequently, and although some feared KSA is helping to spread a radical ideology proximate to that of ISIS, the general impression of KSA is that it has a benign influence on Aqaba.²⁰⁵

"Look at all the extremism and terrorism that has emerged from the Arabian Peninsula until now, among them are Al Qa'ida from Saudi Arabia. Where did the weapons come from for our Muslim brothers to use to fight jihad? The Saudis talk about so-called national security and yet they used to welcome Osama bin Laden at the airport."

(Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

Turkey is thought to have a positive effect on Jordan, but draws criticism from a minority who believes it helps VEOs maintain control in parts of Syria.

Though Turkey is some distance from Aqaba, and does not share a border with Jordan, the majority of respondents felt that it exercises a positive influence over the kingdom. As such, 64 percent of Aqaba GQ

²⁰⁴ "I think Jabhat Al Nusra is funded by Saudi Arabia." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁰⁵ "It's the ideology, even the appearance of ISIS. They are demolishing mosques. This came with the rise of the Saudi regime as ISIS has the same appearance and the same ideology. However, there are ideas in Saudi Arabia that are dangerous to the Saudi regime itself. This is not the regime's ideology, it's the ideology of individuals in Saudi Arabia." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

respondents judged that Turkey has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan, and only 12 percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' negative (see Figure 50). A significant minority, 18 percent of GQ respondents, stated that they thought Turkey's impact is 'neither positive nor negative', which may reflect the physical distance between Aqaba and Turkey.²⁰⁶ Where respondents expressed criticism of Turkey's impact on Jordan this was generally linked to a perception that Turkey materially assists VEOs, especially ISIS, thus indirectly helping them to radicalize and recruit locals, especially youths.²⁰⁷ Several went as far as to suggest Turkey had a deliberate policy of assisting aspiring fighters financially and helping them reach Syria through its territory. Others accused Turkey of financing VEOs indirectly by allowing Turkish buyers to purchase oil from VEO strongholds. However, most respondents had a generally positive view of Turkey and its leader President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, even if they often struggled to detail the ways in which Turkey benefitted Jordan and/or Aqaba governorate.²⁰⁸

"Jordan opened the border for terrorists to enter Syria. Qatar and Saudi fund these extremists, and Turkey also supports them financially and allows terrorists to enter Syria through its borders. Terrorists that entered Syria got in through Turkey. The leaders of ISIS and Jabhat Al Nusra are staying in Qatar, Saudi and Turkey. Turkey earns profits from importing and exporting to Syria."

(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

Syria's effect on Jordan is considered overwhelmingly negative, as the conflict there has provided an incubator for VEOs and damaged trade and tourism in the Kingdom.

The majority of respondents believed that Syria has had a negative effect on Jordan, not least economically.²⁰⁹ For instance, the conflict in Syria has entirely disrupted trade between the two countries and had a downward impact on tourist numbers. Aqaba relies heavily on tourism, and the closing of the border with Syria has reduced the number of visitors who would in the past continue their journey into Syria. The Syrian conflict has also seen the rise of VEOs including JN and ISIS, both of which are very unpopular in Aqaba, and since the death of Al Kasasbeh, ISIS has been seen as a significant threat to national security. Quantitative findings revealed that 62 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents judged that Syria has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only seven percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' positive (see Figure 50). The conflict has also brought Syrian refugees to

²⁰⁶ "Turkey does not impact Jordan in any way, either negatively or positively." (Female, 35, Activist, Aqaba)

²⁰⁷ "We have to understand how the Salafist Jihadists who went to Syria got there, and how they are organized, and how they get their money. Simple countries such as Turkey support them. I assume that Turkey doesn't support them financially, but at least it buys cheap oil that they control." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

²⁰⁸ "I like the Turkish leader, Erdoğan, he is really good." (Male, 25, Hotel Employee, Aqaba)

²⁰⁹ "The economic crisis caused by the war in Syria is still continuing. Jordan is a gate to the Levant region and we used to have Turkish products or Syrian products passing through Jordan to go to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Now this has stopped. This has affected our economy and negatively impacted Jordanian citizens." (Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

Aqaba, who are regarded as competitors for employment, and it has significantly increased a general feeling of regional instability considering the turmoil in neighboring Iraq and Syria.²¹⁰

"The conflict in Syria has had a negative impact on Jordan in terms of our economy. Previously, Syrian goods were always available here as well as the vegetables that used to be imported from Lebanon. Everything is lost now. It had a negative impact on us politically, and economically."

(Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

Local views on Israel appear mainly to reflect historical antagonism.

Jordan has arguably the closest relationship with Israel of any Arab state, and Aqaba shares a dependency on tourism with the neighboring Israeli coastal city of Eilat. However, the vast majority of respondents held a negative view of Israel, believing it to have a malign effect on Jordan. This stemmed from the widespread belief that the Israeli state mistreats Palestinians, along with a deep-seated historical antagonism related to the creation of Israel at the expense of Arab Palestinians. Some respondents even believed that the lack of resolution to the issue of Palestine is one of the most important underlying causes of extremism across the Middle East.²¹¹ 92 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents judged that Israel has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only 2 percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' positive (see Figure 50). These findings seem to reflect popular dislike of Israel itself and its treatment of Palestinians rather than any demonstrably negative effects that Israel might have on Jordan or Aqaba.

The people in Aqaba consider Israel to be Jordan's main enemy since it took the land of Palestine. In the demonstrations in Aqaba between 2011 and 2014, the people called for the government to end its relationship with Israel and to drop the Wadi Araba agreement [1994 Peace Treaty]."

(Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

Locals are critical of Russia's involvement in Syria alongside the Assad regime, and views on Russian tourists are mixed.

Where respondents referenced Russia in a regional context it was generally linked to the Syrian conflict and most commented specifically on Russia's relationship with the Assad regime. Russia attracted general criticism for supporting the Syrian regime, and specifically for its bombing campaign in Syria. Russian aerial bombings were seen as poorly targeted and believed to result in civilian casualties. Some respondents even questioned whether in some instances the Russian air force is aware which group(s)

²¹⁰ "ISIS or Al Nusra, I don't care about these groups, I care about civilians that are being killed. When you watch a video of Aleppo. There is a video that they showed the other day that a cat will not survive there – not even a bird will survive. The ground is like Hitler's holocaust. What is happening is unbelievable." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²¹¹ "The Palestinian cause is one of the most important reasons for extremism in the region, for as long as there is no solution for the Palestinian cause, extremism will have fertile ground to breed." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

they are attacking.²¹² Quantitative findings revealed that the majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 77 percent, thought that Russia has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only three percent thought that its impact is 'very' or 'somewhat' positive (see Figure 50). Notably, a significant minority of GQ respondents, 17 percent, thought Russia's effect on Jordan is 'neither positive nor negative', indicating that a segment of respondents were perhaps unsure as to how Russia impacts Jordan at all. Aside from its regional activities, Russia's reputation among locals is tainted by the behavior of its tourists in Aqaba. Unlike Europeans for instance, Russian visitors are considered excessively frugal, often limiting their outgoings to pre-paid package holidays and five-star hotel bars on the South Beach. However, some respondents were complimentary of Russians who visited Aqaba, either as tourists or to work in the hospitality industry there, and argued that most locals have no problem with Russian citizens.²¹³

"I feel that whoever supports the Syrian government also supports these extremist groups, like Russia and China. We all know how the Syrian government thinks and its ways and they are no different than ISIS. They used to take youths whom they suspect and torture them and we all know that. People who come here from Syria tell stories. The government take guys from every village in Syria and arrests them. I mentioned China and Russia because they are with the Syrian government but I'm against them."

(Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

²¹² "I blame Russia for starting its bombing campaign in Syria. An aircraft that bombs without knowing who it is bombing is not good." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²¹³ "People in Aqaba don't have anything against Russia, and many Russians come to Aqaba as tourists as well as workers in hotels. They like them and respect them." (Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

6.2 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC INTERVENTIONISM

Both Western and Jordanian military intervention in Syria is feared to be increasing the spread of VE in Jordan.

The majority of respondents thought that Western intervention in Syria, mainly through an aerial bombing campaign, is exacerbating the issue of VE in Jordan. Some respondents explicitly stated that they saw the intervention of US-led Western powers in Syria as a driver of youth radicalization in Jordan. There were also fears that Western intervention is playing into VEO narratives that portray Western 'colonial' powers as intent on conquering Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia.²¹⁴ In fact, 62 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Western intervention in Syria is fuelling VE in Jordan, though a sizeable minority of 32 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 45). Similarly, the majority did not see Jordanian interference in Syria as a positive thing and feared that this could further destabilize the region.²¹⁵ As such, 71 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fuelling VE in Jordan, while 21 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 46). This is despite the fact that many respondents considered Jordan's involvement in the anti-ISIS coalition to be justified following ISIS's murder of Kasasbeh in January 2015.

"A high percentage of people from Aqaba agree with Jordan's intervention in Syria, particularly as we are fighting ISIS. Since we share a wide border with Syria and those extremist groups, if they control Syria they come to Jordan eventually. Also, after Moath Al Kasasbeh's death we feel we should pay back ISIS for what they did since they directly affected us by killing one of our soldiers in such cruel way. On the other hand, we were scared that ISIS will try and take revenge for this intervention against them and will try to commit terrorist attacks in Jordan because we are fighting against them and have become an essential part of the coalition against ISIS."

(Female, 21, Student, Aqaba)

²¹⁴ "Through the media you can see that there are young people fighting against the Iraqi state, against the American colonizers, against the Russian colonial power in Afghanistan or in Syria. This could be the biggest motivating force for young people to move and defend the lands of Muslims and to take up an extremist ideology." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²¹⁵ "Any intervention in the affairs of Syria is going to destabilize Jordan as well as other countries, even Saudi Arabia." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

Figure 45. To what extent do you agree that Western intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?

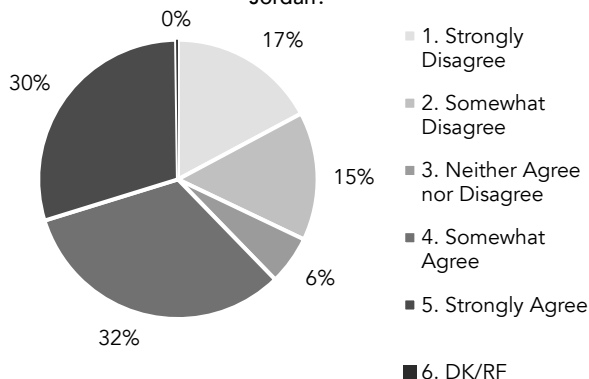
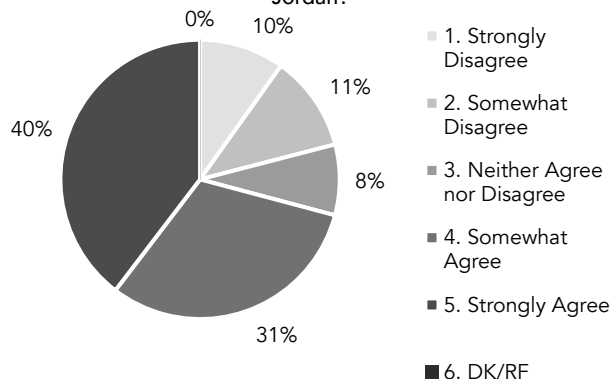


Figure 46. To what extent do you agree that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?



The West is thought to have undue influence over Jordan and many fear this is angering locals, making them more vulnerable to anti-Western VEO narratives.

Jordan is felt to be reliant on the West for arms supplies, which it cannot otherwise afford to buy given its limited national budget. Some respondents thought this obliged the central government to do whatever its Western allies instructed it to, and believed this is the reason for Jordanian involvement in the coalition against ISIS. This ties into a broader narrative that Jordan is beholden to the West. Indeed, although 49 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the central government does what the West says, a significant minority of 38 percent stated that they 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 47). Perceived Western interference in Jordan was viewed with hostility by some respondents, who argued that negative perceptions of the US, Jordan's principal Western ally, risked angering Jordanians and making them more vulnerable to VEO narratives attacking the West. Such narratives can be seen in a number of videos made by ISIS, which often depicts the US and other Western allies of Jordan – such as the UK and France – as 'crusader' states.²¹⁶ Quantitative findings revealed that the majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 74 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Western intervention in Jordan is fuelling VE in Jordan, and only 19 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 48). These findings suggest that Western involvement in Jordan is angering locals to the point where they are more susceptible to radicalization, especially if exposed to narratives playing on frustration at Jordan's perceived loss of sovereignty to its Western allies.

"If Jordan was not in the coalition, no one would collaborate with us. Jordan is a poor country and all of its weapons come from the US or the UK, and thus they won't support us with arms and weapons if we do not help fight ISIS."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

²¹⁶ Osborne, Samuel 2015. 'ISIS releases new video showing 'final battle with crusaders' in Rome', Independent, December 11, 2015.

Figure 47. To what extent do you agree that the central government does what the West says?

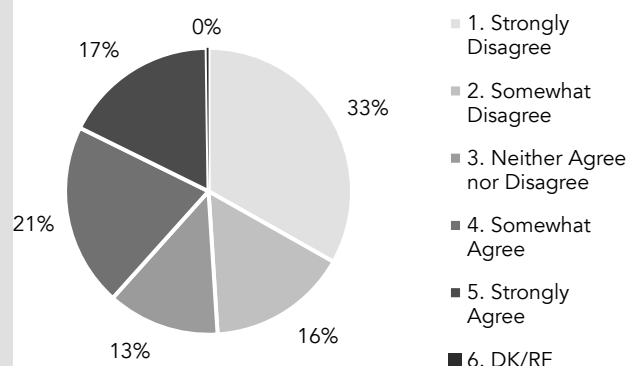
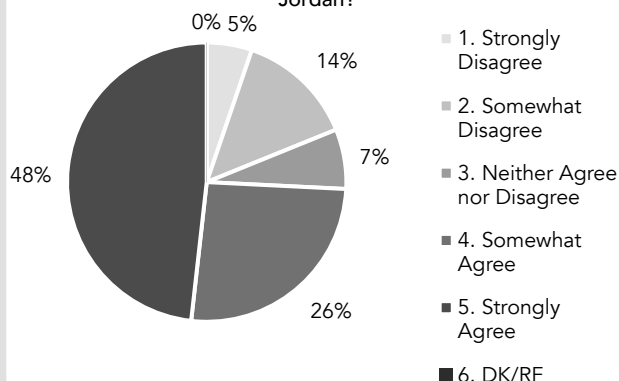


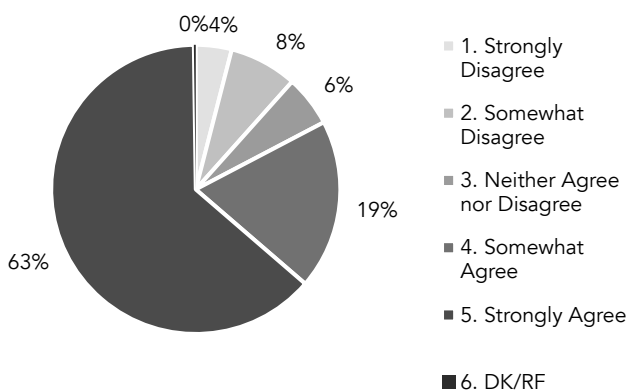
Figure 48. To what extent do you agree that Western intervention in Jordan is fueling VE in Jordan?



The majority of respondents approve of Jordan's participation in the coalition against ISIS, particularly after the murder of Kasasbeh by the VEO.

Jordan's decision to join the coalition against ISIS is largely viewed in a positive light. Indeed, although Kasasbeh's death was the direct result of Jordan's involvement in the aerial campaign against ISIS in Syria, as his plane crashed during a mission against ISIS targets there, his brutal murder was thought to justify the campaign in the first place. Quantitative findings indicated that 82 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Jordanian intervention against ISIS is justifiable, while 12 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that this is the case (see Figure 49). Given strongly negative attitudes towards ISIS among the vast majority of respondents it is likely that Jordan's participation in the wider anti-ISIS coalition will continue to enjoy popular backing.

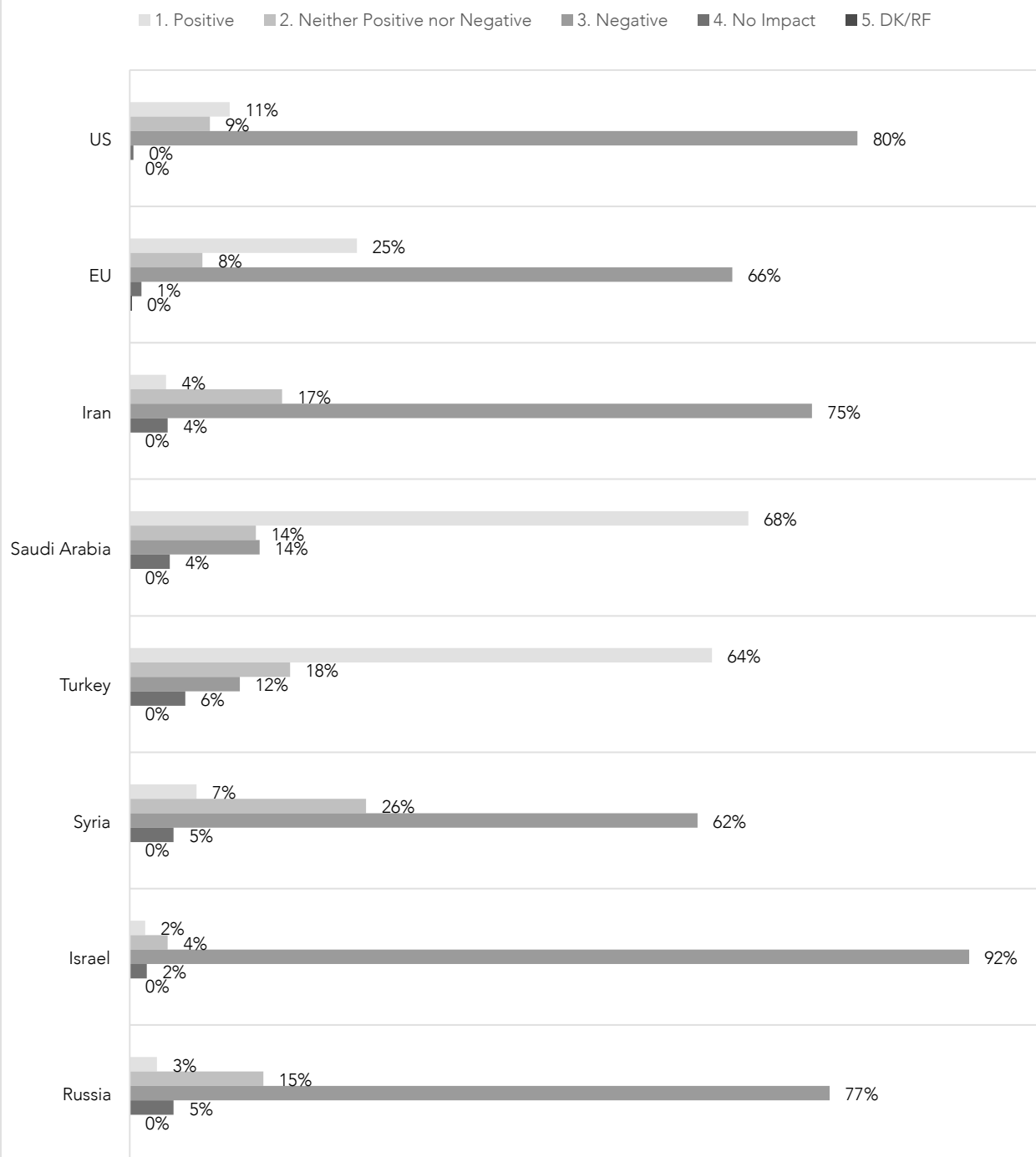
Figure 49. To what extent do you agree that Jordanian intervention against ISIS is justifiable?



"Before the incident, some Jordanians supported ISIS and believed that they were the right image and form of Islam. The murder of Moath proved to us the brutality of ISIS supporters and made all Jordanians believe that ISIS fighters are terrorists. The story of Moath united all Jordanians and made them believe even more in their leaders."

(Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

Figure 50. 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

Propaganda from both ISIS and JN is seen as fuelling VE in Jordan, though locals acknowledge that ISIS is much more effective at producing and disseminating its promotional material.

ISIS and JN are known to be actively using the Internet and social media to spread propaganda in both video and text form, as accessed by locals in Aqaba.²¹⁷ Respondents commonly identified Facebook,²¹⁸ YouTube and Twitter as the main platforms used by these groups to present themselves in a positive light and attract supporters and/or new members.²¹⁹ ISIS was considered the most effective at both producing and disseminating propaganda and promoting itself, though both ISIS and JN were thought to employ similar themes to appeal to Internet users. Such themes include the importance of defending Sunni Syrians from the Assad regime and its Shia allies Iran and Hezbollah, and the religious duty of Muslims to participate in jihad. 88 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that ISIS propaganda is fuelling VE in Jordan, while only nine percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 51). Meanwhile, only 66 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that JN propaganda is fuelling VE in Jordan, while similarly only 13 percent reported that they 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 52). Notably, 21 percent of respondents 'neither agreed nor disagreed' that JN propaganda is effective in increasing VE in Jordan, underlining the strength of ISIS's propaganda material and its dissemination methods compared to its closest rival in Syria. The two most successful forms of ISIS propaganda were identified as its online magazine Dabiq and the VEO's prolific video output. Respondents recognized that the latter is often published on YouTube where users can download it before it is removed from the site.²²⁰

"Videos made by extremist groups mostly talk about jihad and war. I think this affects us because we are Muslims and we feel they have to stand up for our people. If you see your cousin get killed in a fight with someone you avenge them so how about other Muslims who are being killed? That's how some people get affected by these videos and then they join extremist groups."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

²¹⁷ "We hear that recruitment to violent groups happens via the Internet and Facebook. It's like their Ministry of foreign affairs. I heard that the majority of them use Facebook and Twitter, in addition to Dabiq and that they work 24/7." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

²¹⁸ "Some people adopt an extremist ideology through watching YouTube, Facebook and other social media networks, which are utilized by the extremist groups." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

²¹⁹ "If they only allowed ISIS to post material freely on YouTube and Facebook and other websites you would see that many people would see this and join them." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²²⁰ "I get ISIS videos from the internet, from YouTube. They are quickly deleted, but I download them before YouTube deletes them. In one video they showed the interrogation of Kasasbeh where he admits everything, and he mentions the locations of military bases in Jordan." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

Figure 51. To what extent do you agree that ISIS propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan?

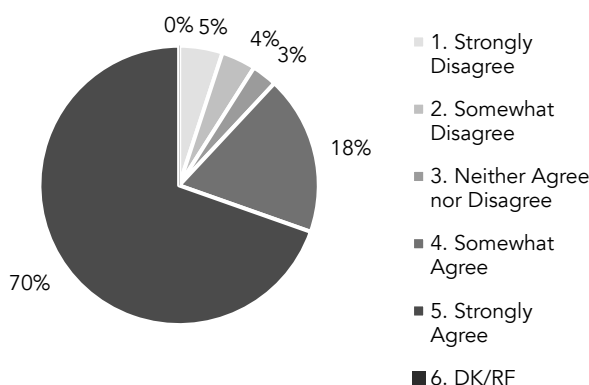
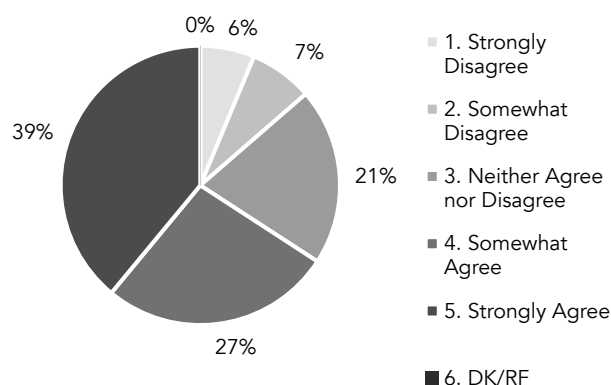


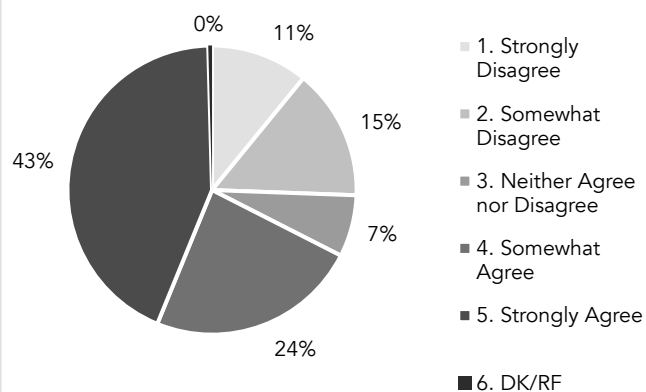
Figure 52. To what extent do you agree that JN propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan?



The Internet and social media are key VEO recruitment and propaganda platforms.

The majority of respondents argued that the Internet and social media play a leading role in exposing locals to propaganda material aimed at radicalizing viewers and/or encouraging them to join VEOs – mainly ISIS and JN in Syria or Iraq. Youths were seen as the demographic most at risk of radicalization through the Internet and social media,²²¹ not least because they spend more time online than older locals, particularly visiting sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, all of which VEOs use as promotional platforms. Respondents highlighted how easy it is to find VE material online,²²² including speeches by ISIS leader, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi,²²³ and propaganda videos featuring Jordanian VEO members,²²⁴ such as one YouTube video depicting a Jordanian ISIS

Figure 53. To what extent do you agree that the Internet/social media is fueling VE in Jordan?



²²¹ "Social media outlets are really scary because it is easy for them to attract the youth." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

²²² "Extremists can spread their ideology on social media and young people can be easily reached, and they are not fully mature and aware. That's why this can be dangerous." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

²²³ "Maybe nobody needed to actively convince those who joined ISIS. Maybe they just used Facebook. Anyone can be sitting with guys and suggest that they watch a certain video or look at Baghdadi's page." (Male, 31, Teacher, Aqaba)

²²⁴ "The Facebook community or the internet community in general might give you correct information or wrong information about extremism. You'll see videos, you'll see youths tearing up their passports and other things like this." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

fighter destroying his passport.²²⁵ Quantitative findings indicated that 67 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the Internet/social media is fuelling VE in Jordan, and 26 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 53). The Internet was seen as an ideal medium for VEOs to recruit for a number of reasons. For example, it is difficult to regulate the content visible to users and, particularly in the case of youths, parents are unable to control what their children see and who they communicate with online.²²⁶ Respondents were especially concerned that VEO recruiters could approach individuals online, often through Facebook by adding them as a 'friend'. This potentially leads to a virtual relationship with them, enabling VEO operatives to more easily persuade individuals to join the VEO itself. At the same time however, some respondents considered social media activity to provide an effective means of identifying individuals who might be at risk of radicalization and/or recruitment by a VEO.²²⁷ Indeed, the GID has been known to arrest locals who make radical statements online.²²⁸ As it is unlikely that VEOs will cease using the Internet and social media as promotional platforms, these media will probably continue to offer the easiest and most effective way for VEOs to spread their ideology and identify potential recruits in Aqaba.

"Extremist groups can reach youths very easily via Facebook. They could have spies in all sites, and they could spot the weak people. I don't know what kind of profile or page name they have, but they send them a friend request and start talking to them – at first as friends and then they investigate them: what kind of ideas they have, and if they are unemployed and come from a poor family, or have a brother [who] is handicapped, or are a drug-addicts and cannot afford to buy hashish or heroin. So they start giving them money, and in the end this person becomes obedient to the recruiter because he is someone trustworthy now, someone who helped him when no one else was there."

(Male, 23, Sales Manager, Aqaba)

²²⁵ YouTube, 2014. 'ISIS Jordanian threatens Jordan', YouTube, June 27, 2014.

²²⁶ "How many of us have their fathers as friends on Facebook? Very few. My parent's generation currently doesn't have a Facebook page." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²²⁷ "90 percent of young people have Facebook and I believe that Facebook accounts mirror the user and his ideas. Sometimes you can see there is something wrong and if their opinions have changed." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

²²⁸ "My cousin who was arrested has no problems that would make him become an extremist. He just feels guilty for the life he has lived, that's why he wants to go on jihad. He communicated directly with ISIS using the Internet." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

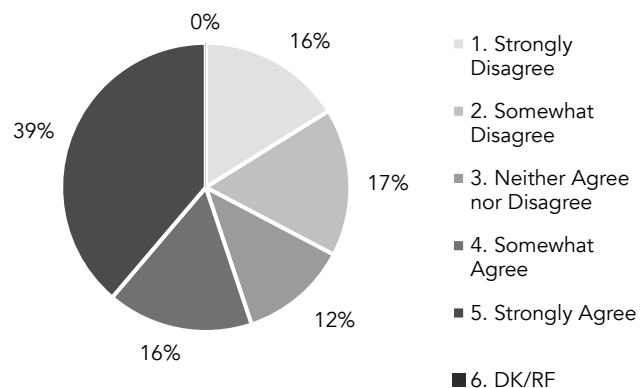
7.2 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The media is widely believed to exaggerate the problem of VE in Jordan, though locals distinguish between international and domestic news sources.

The media is widely believed to exaggerate the danger that VE in general and VEOs specifically posed to Jordan's security and stability.²²⁹ Many respondents expressed doubts as to the credibility of news reports from the various media outlets available in Jordan, notably because many of the statements and bulletins broadcast can appear contradictory.²³⁰ Some observed that leading television channels such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya and Al Baghdadiya frequently differ in the way that they present and analyze events in the region,²³¹ and employ differing approaches to subjects related to Islam, including Islamic extremism.²³² Respondents closely associated regional news

channels with the foreign policy goals of the Middle Eastern states funding the channels and/or providing the channels' headquarters. For example, Al Jazeera was seen as a mouthpiece of the Qatari state,²³³ as was Al Arabiya for the KSA regime. Overall, 55 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan, while 33 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that this is the case (see Figure 54). Respondents often distinguished between domestic, government-controlled and international media groups. Some believed that the information broadcast by international channels is questionable due to the ties between these channels and foreign states like Qatar and KSA. In fact, several respondents claimed to prefer Jordanian media to foreign-based channels whose content they deemed untrustworthy.

Figure 54. To what extent do you agree that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan?



"We believe that our official Jordanian media channel is honest and it is the only channel we get news from. As a Jordanian citizen, I don't wait for the news to come from the Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya channels." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

²²⁹ "The media just scares people and brainwashes them about extremist groups." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²³⁰ "The media send out misleading messages all the time so it is hard to imagine what it is really like on the battlefield in Syria." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

²³¹ "For example Al Jazeera has a particular view point, Al Arabiya has a particular view point, Al-Anbar Iraqi network has a particular view point, The Al Baghdadiya network also has another particular viewpoint." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

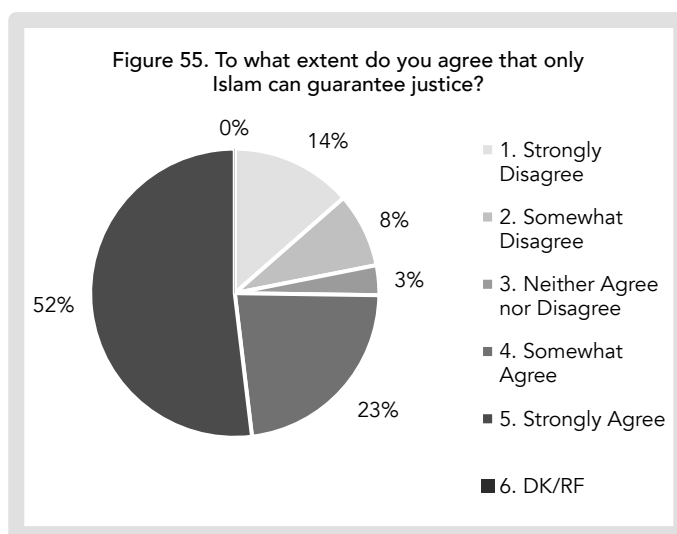
²³² "When I watch the Al Arabiya channel or MBC or other channels I think that they do not represent Islam." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²³³ Kühn, Alexander and Christoph Reuter, 2013. 'After the Arab Spring: Al Jazeera losing the battle for independence', Der Spiegel, February 15, 2015.

7.3 THE ROLE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Most respondents strongly believe that Islam should be the basis for a fair legal system in Jordan but disagree that a Caliphate is the best form of governance.

The majority of residents in Aqaba are observant Muslims with a belief that Islam is a fair religion and that Sharia – the body of law laid down in the Qur'an – is the ideal basis for the legal system in Jordan. As such, 75 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that only Islam can guarantee justice, while 22 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 55). Further, 85 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Sharia should be the only source of law, while only 12 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 56). While some were concerned that religious extremism is on the rise in Aqaba,²³⁴ most were confident that observant Muslims are more



likely to reject than adopt VE narratives. This is not least because they are thought to have a sufficient understanding of their own religion and religious texts to reject VEO 'Islamic' justifications for their actions.²³⁵ While 40 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that a Caliphate will help restore Islam, 55 percent of respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 57). This finding should not be taken to reflect support for the 'Caliphate' established by ISIS. In fact, respondents often identified the concept of a Caliphate as a reference to a historical 'golden age' of Islam following the death of the Prophet Mohammad. This is starkly contrasted with the Caliphate claimed by ISIS.

"Of course religious leaders are to blame for radicalization because most of the sheikhs reinforce extremism. If you attend any Friday prayer in any mosque, you'll hear the imam talking about the Caliphate, jihad and infidels in the West. This does not create an environment ready to contain extremism – an environment [in which people believe] that they are the only ones who are right, and that if they fight jihad they will go to heaven. This happens in all of our mosques."

(Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

²³⁴ "In every mosque it's like, "make the mujahedeen victorious in Syria". Yes, in Aqaba you can hear these things." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

²³⁵ "Unfortunately, I believe that religious extremism is on the rise. Friends, acquaintances, sometimes you get into discussions, and people reject your idea. They want to make the state Islamic, they want an Islamic state, and they want this and that – the Caliphate state." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

Figure 56. To what extent do you agree that Sharia should be the only source of law?

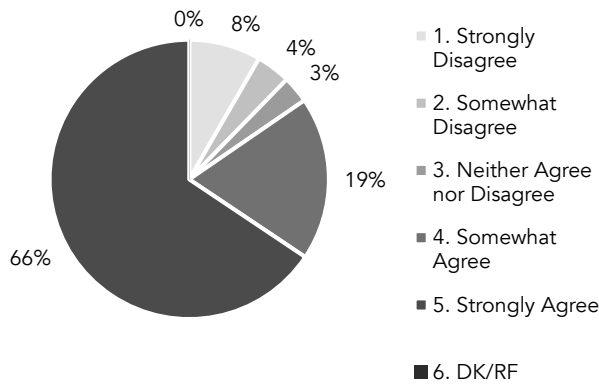
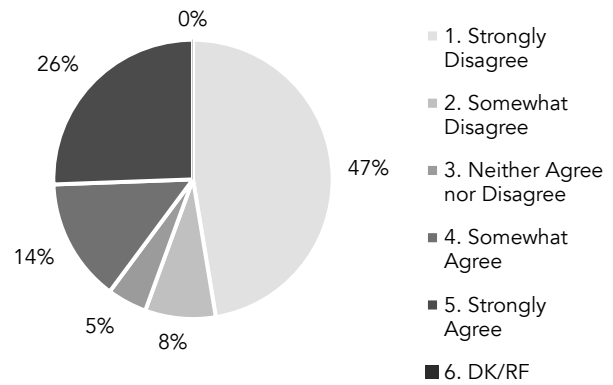


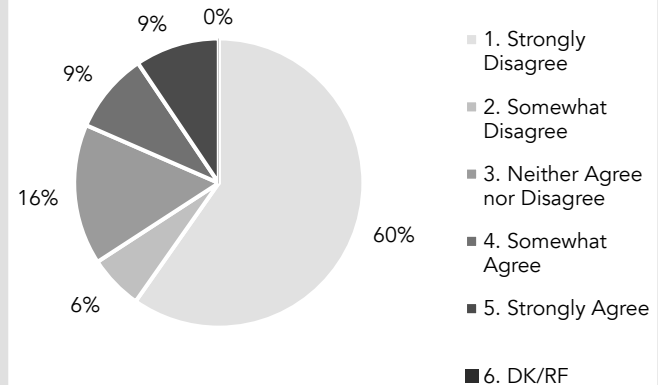
Figure 57. To what extent do you agree that the Caliphate will help restore Islam?



The majority rejects the concept of Takfir, and of the minority that considers it justified in some instances, few accept ISIS's right to declare other Muslims apostates.

Takfir, the practice of one Muslim declaring another to be an unbeliever, is often associated with ISIS, and as such the VEO is often referred to as a 'takfiri' group. However, the majority of respondents rejected the VEO's right to unilaterally declare other Muslims Takfir, and many even rejected the concept itself. In fact, 66 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the practice of Takfir is justifiable, while only 18 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 58). Though Takfir may be linked with VEOs, it is a widely accepted concept in Islam, not unlike excommunication in the Catholic Church. As such it should not be assumed that those respondents who agree with Takfir in principle are necessarily sympathetic to VEOs who employ Takfir, or that they hold radical religious views that could make them vulnerable to VEO propaganda.

Figure 58. To what extent do you agree that the practice of Takfir is justifiable?



"I don't see extremism or terrorism as an issue in Jordan. There are criminal issues like robberies, corruption, violence between tribes and violence in universities and this is what we hear about rather than terrorist attacks."

(Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

Violent jihad in Israel is largely believed to be justifiable and the 1994 peace treaty remains deeply unpopular in Aqaba.

There is significant antipathy towards Israel among locals, which led 65 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents to 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agree that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable, though 33 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 59). These findings have their basis in strong sympathy for Palestinians, many of whom fled to Jordan following Israel's creation in 1948 and the Israeli takeover of the West Bank in 1967. Respondents thought Palestinian citizens, especially in Gaza and the West Bank, continue to suffer from maltreatment by the Israeli authorities and the IDF. In fact, some even questioned why locals had joined or attempted to join VEOs in Syria to fight jihad when neighboring Israel offered the same opportunity and is much closer.²³⁶ Others identified the MB as an organization that actively prioritizes the idea of jihad against Israel.²³⁷ However, others acknowledged the difficulty in attacking Israel given the amount of security on both sides of the border, suggesting that calls for jihad against Israel by the MB and locals supportive of Palestinians may be nothing more than rhetoric.²³⁸ In accordance with negative views on Israel, the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty is unpopular in Aqaba. Indeed, in October 2015 there was a protest in Aqaba City condemning the agreement and demanding that it be cancelled. 55 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that it is a betrayal for Islam and Arabs while 28 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 60). Notably, 17 percent neither agreed nor disagreed that it is a betrayal, indicating that a minority was ambivalent on the issue. One respondent highlighted the constructive aspects of the entente with Israel, especially the fact that it has been instrumental in ensuring that aid could be sent from Jordan to Gaza in the past.²³⁹ Given strong sympathy for Palestinians and historical antipathy towards Israel it is unlikely that attitudes in Aqaba will soften significantly. But there is little indication that locals have any desire to stage public anti-Israel demonstrations and/or attempt to force the closing of the border between Aqaba and neighboring Eilat.

"A national demonstration in Aqaba was organized in October 2015 that started from the front of Al Kabeer mosque in central Aqaba, that went throughout the city and denounced the Zionist aggression against the Al Aqsa mosque. Protestors called for the end of the peace treaty and for the Israeli ambassador to be expelled from Jordan. They called the treaty a shame and a disgrace."

(Female, 35, Researcher, Aqaba)

²³⁶ "He left his job and his wife for it. He is an educated person who went to fight in Syria while the distance between him and Israel was only five kilometers (about three miles). He could've gone there to fight!" (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

²³⁷ "The Muslim Brotherhood are not extremists. Their main cause is Palestine and they only call for violence in certain cases and only in Palestine, which they consider jihad." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²³⁸ "The security measurements on the borders are extremely tight; it is very hard to bomb there [in Palestine] or do anything." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²³⁹ "If we didn't have this peace treaty, we wouldn't have been able to send help to Gaza hospital. The peace treaty was the best political act in the nineties era." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

Figure 59. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable?

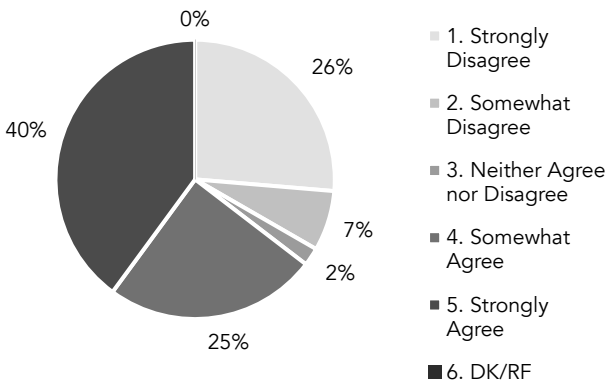
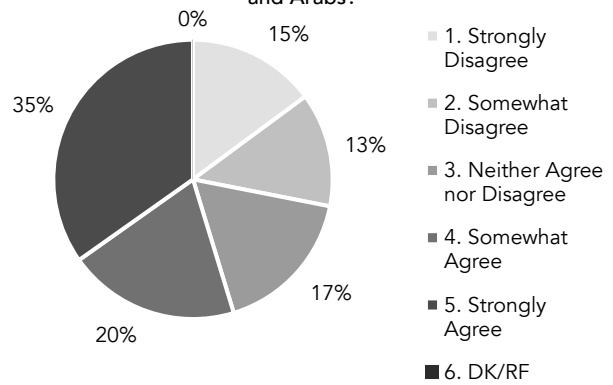


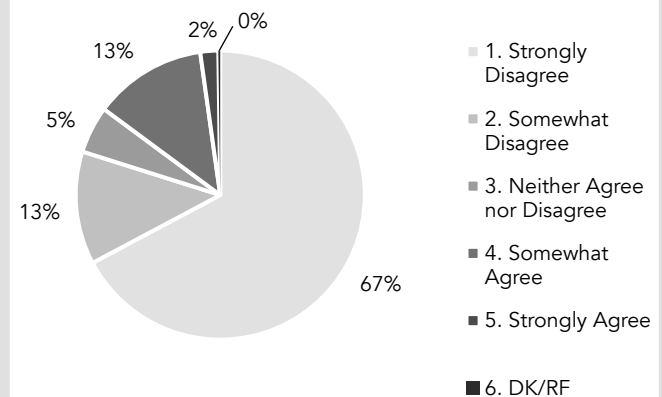
Figure 60. To what extent do you agree that the Jordan-Israel peace treaty is a betrayal for Islam and Arabs?



Syria is considered an illegitimate destination for jihad and many believe that VEOs and armed groups are only fuelling the conflict there.

In the early years of the Syrian conflict, locals were thought to be more likely to consider Syria a legitimate destination for those wishing to fight jihad, as images of the fighting fuelled a desire among locals to help fellow Sunni Muslims.²⁴⁰ However, the vast majority of respondents in Aqaba did not consider it acceptable to travel to Syria to engage in jihad.²⁴¹ As such, 80 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad in Syria is justifiable, while only 15 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 61). The Syrian conflict was largely viewed in a negative light, not least because it was thought to provide a place to which impressionable locals, especially youths, might be drawn, only to be radicalized and/or killed.²⁴² However,

Figure 61. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Syria is justifiable?



²⁴⁰ "Look, at the beginning of the Syrian revolution we saw massacres. It was very emotional and it was easy at that time for anyone to get recruited and go fight in Syria. But right now I don't think anyone would go." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁴¹ "Things aren't clear in Syria and it is not proper jihad. Muslims are fighting Muslims. You could die without knowing your murderer. You might be killed without knowing the reason why you were killed." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

²⁴² "If it weren't for the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, then there wouldn't be fertile environments for extremism. Young people can go and practice their extremism by travelling to Syria and Iraq to fight. This was an opportunity for all extremists. And by extremism here, I mean those who want to fight jihad." (Male, 24, Student, Aqaba)

there is great sympathy among locals in Aqaba for the suffering of Syrian civilians,²⁴³ and many respondents expressed strong hostility to the Assad regime, which was accused of harming its own citizens, especially Sunni Syrians.²⁴⁴ Furthermore, it is clear that as the conflict has progressed locals have come to question whether the various groups, be they VEO or moderate Islamist, are having a positive impact or merely prolonging and/or fuelling the conflict and the suffering of Syrians. Consequently, respondents did not believe traveling to Syria to fight is constructive in terms of helping to resolve the conflict. Others criticized doing so on the basis that what is happening in Syria cannot rightly be described as jihad, or because they thought fighting to free Palestine from Israeli control is more important than fighting in Syria.

"I know Islam, which speaks about if the land of Muslims is invaded or occupied, and I know that Syria is a Muslim land, even though there are people from all different sects. But look at Palestine: it is where people should go to fight jihad and instead people are actually going to Syria for jihad. These people are influenced by this sick and disturbing [VEO] ideology, and this makes people do as the extremists tell them. They tell them to make themselves into a bomb, and blow themselves up in a store just to rattle the governing regime. What kind of sick jihad is that? That's not jihad."

(Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

Few see jihad in Europe as acceptable, but Western countries are often thought to act in an anti-Islamic fashion, which the majority in Aqaba finds deeply offensive.

Some respondents portrayed Aqaba as a more 'international' governorate than others in Jordan given the many tourists who visit every year.²⁴⁵ They implied that this made people in Aqaba more open-minded and tolerant than elsewhere in Jordan. 76 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad in Europe is justifiable, although a rather significant minority of 19 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 62). Some respondents expressed concerns that the recent terrorist attacks in France would cause people in the West to treat Muslims differently,²⁴⁶ and this in turn seems to be fuelling resentment against Europe and the 'West' in general. Though few thought Europe deserved to suffer terrorist attacks, the vast majority of respondents were concerned that Islam and Muslims are seen in a negative light in Europe and the US. This in turn affected the way some saw the West. In fact, 81 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the West is humiliating Islam, whereas only 13 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 63). Such acts as the banning of the Islamic face covering for women, the burka, in France and the *Charlie Hebdo*

²⁴³ "We need to concentrate on an important issue. Jordan is a part and parcel of the Arab world. The entire world was affected by what happened in Iraq and Syria. Seeing all this blood, huge numbers of wounded and dead individuals would definitely have an effect on individuals' behavior even though this effect could be just the smile that will fade away from people's faces. We feel what they are going through." (Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

²⁴⁴ "The media made people sympathize with them. When you see your brothers in Syria getting killed and their women raped it is natural that you will feel that you need to do something about it." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁴⁵ "Jordan has relations and international contracts with everyone." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

²⁴⁶ "The attacks that occurred in France made people treat Muslims differently." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad, which led to protests in Amman, were seen as a deliberate attack against Islam, causing deep offence in Aqaba where most people are practicing Muslims. However, there was no indication from respondents that anger over perceived slights to their religion might translate into any physical action in Aqaba, such as an attack against Western tourists. But it is clear that any moves by Western countries that could be interpreted as anti-Islamic have been deeply divisive even in tourist-friendly Aqaba.

"Tourism increases the awareness and education of the people because they deal with different societies and cultures. People in Aqaba are exposed to many people from different backgrounds and cultures, which positively affects the Aqaba street's own culture."

(Male, 39, Cleric, Aqaba)

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

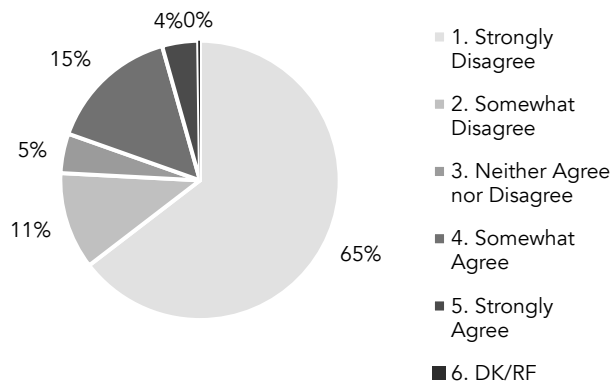
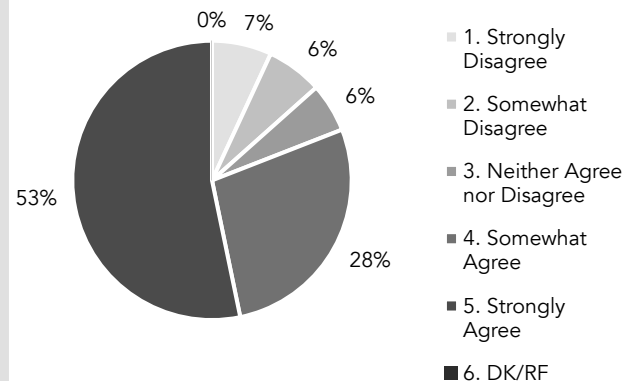


Figure 63. To what extent do you agree that the West is humiliating Islam?



The majority in Aqaba does not consider jihad against Shias justifiable, though a sizeable minority are vocally sectarian.

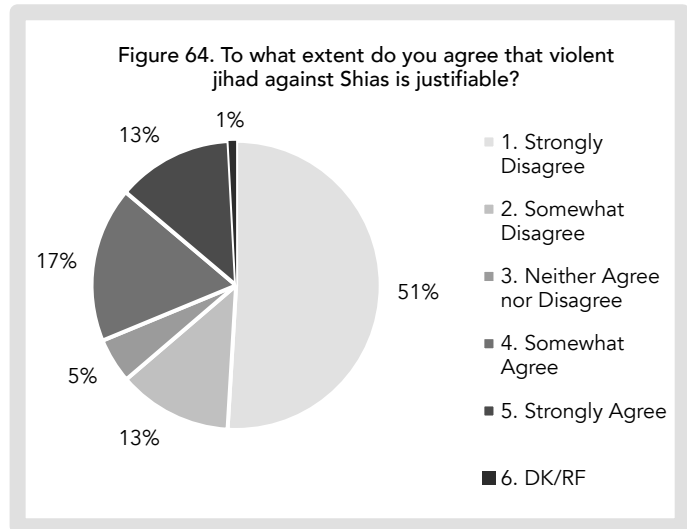
Though the majority of respondents in Aqaba did not feel that it is acceptable to attack Shia Muslims solely on the basis of their religion, a significant minority held strongly negative sectarian views toward them.²⁴⁷ This minority's hostility was often linked to a general increase in sectarian sentiment following Iranian involvement in Iraq and Syria, which was associated with the persecution of Sunni Arabs. The religious orientation of the Assad regime has also been a significant factor accounting for increasing local sectarianism. For example, one local from Aqaba who went to fight in Syria against the Alawite-led Assad regime justified his actions on the basis that he was fighting Shias, as he and most respondents viewed

²⁴⁷ "The word 'infidels' is becoming more widely used. There are many people who think that people deserve what ISIS is doing to them. Some people thought that the man that was run over by ISIS with a tank deserved it because he was a Shia." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

Alawites as Shia Muslims. In this regard, 64 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable while 30 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 64).

Though Shia Muslims are a tiny minority of the total population in Jordan, some respondents expressed concern over an alleged strategy, led by Iran and the Shia-led Iraqi government, to expand Shia Islam and Shia control in the region.²⁴⁸ According to respondents, this narrative can be found online in the form of fatwas issued against Shias, as well as in Aqaba's mosques, some of which are known to refer to Shias using the derogatory term 'Rafidha' ('rejectionists'),²⁴⁹ which emphasizes their perceived rejection of mainstream Sunni Islam. Nonetheless, the perception that Shias are a legitimate target for jihad is not as pronounced in Aqaba as in other governorates like Zarqa.

This may reflect positive views of the Shia militant group, Hezbollah, due to its armed opposition to Israel. It may also be linked to Aqaba's physical distance from both the Syrian and Iraqi borders, which limits concerns that the governorate might be directly affected by perceived Shia expansionism in the region.



"This guy who went to fight in Syria, he thought that the regime was Shia and Alawite and he said that it is our duty to kill them and that this is jihad. He would say 'Look, jihad is obligatory for every Muslim. God ordered us to do it'."

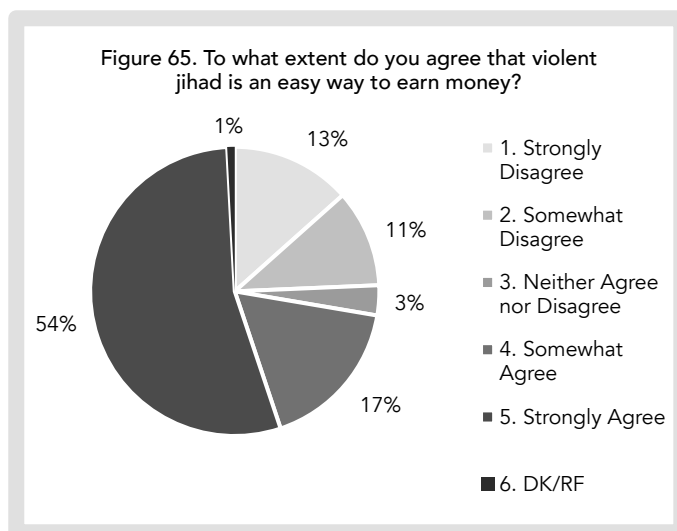
(Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁴⁸ "I am not against the Shia, but if they were to reach Jordan tomorrow they would have mercy for anyone. This is why our country needs to have a strong Islamic, Sunni character just like the Shias have." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁴⁹ "About sectarianism; the majority of the Muslim Jordanian population (99 percent) are Sunni, but the extremists try and paint the conflict as a sectarian one between Sunnis and Shiites, between Muslims and non-believers, so imagine when someone comes to you or if you read a fatwa on social media, and hear the mosques here, the "Rafidha Shiites" all of this has an impact, so does the preaching in the mosques about regarding jihad in Syria." (Male, 49, Civil Servant, Aqaba)

Many think jihad offers an easy way to make money, either as a VEO member or as a people smuggler.

It was widely believed that there are financial rewards to joining and helping others join VEOs,²⁵⁰ which is especially tempting for those who are unemployed and/or struggling financially.²⁵¹ Some respondents thought that members of ISIS are paid up to 1,400 USD per month, and had other benefits including free transportation and basic services like water and electricity. They also believed the VEO could afford to pay well because it earned a substantial income from the illegal sale of oil in its territories. Smuggling Jordanians into Syria so that they can go on to join a VEO was also considered lucrative. Indeed, some respondents speculated that smugglers could make between 2,000 and 5,000 JD per person that they help across the border, which is many times the average salary of around 400 JD per month in Aqaba.²⁵²



The majority of Aqaba GQ respondents, 71 percent, 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that violent jihad is an easy way to make money, while 24 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 65). Despite the availability of opportunities within the tourism sector of Aqaba City, unemployment is still a problem for locals in Aqaba, and one respondent thought that it could even take university graduates up to three years to find a suitable job.²⁵³ As such, the perceived financial benefits of VEO membership will remain tempting for a minority of locals.²⁵⁴ However, the limited number of locals who have joined VEOs like JN and ISIS since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011 would seem to indicate that few are likely to travel to Syria to fight purely for financial reasons.

²⁵⁰ "According to what I know, ISIS do give their members money, and they do target the youth." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

²⁵¹ "Extremists take advantage of poverty; they pay money to recruit people...[whose] economic conditions are difficult or [who] want to improve their financial status. They tell them that in Jordan they are humiliated and harassed, and that this democracy is only decorative and fake." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

²⁵² "The smugglers do this for money. Some people have financial motives, others have political or religious motives. I don't know how much they are paid to smuggle someone. I hear numbers between 2000 and 5000 JD." (Male, 28, Finance Manager, Aqaba)

²⁵³ "The period after 22 years of age is when they are most likely to be recruited by extremist groups, and by then youths would have finished university. But then they graduate university and sit for 2-3 years until they find a jobs." (Male, 39, Shopkeeper, Aqaba)

²⁵⁴ "Maybe youths face financial pressure or social problems so they become VEO members or someone brainwashed them and convinced them to join." (Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

"If you are with ISIS the salaries are more than 1,400 USD per month with free transportation, and they have electricity and water for free, and very low taxes. ISIS controls land that has oil and they sell the oil to get money."

(Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

VEOs, especially ISIS, are not seen as militarily effective, and repeated defeats have damaged ISIS's reputation as a powerful and resilient armed group.

ISIS frequently aims to present itself, especially in its propaganda videos, as a militarily effective organization. Such videos frequently depict its fighters, who are generally young males,²⁵⁵ training and fighting together to emphasize their skill on the battlefield.²⁵⁶ However, most respondents rejected this portrayal: 75 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that VEO members are skilled fighters, while only 19 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 66). This can be seen to reflect the fact that ISIS has suffered a series of defeats in Iraq and Syria in 2015 and 2016, including the loss of Kobani in March 2015, Ramadi in December 2015, and the town of Manbij in Syria in August 2016. VEOs, particularly ISIS, also often present their members, especially their fighters, as a close-knit and mutually supportive group, emphasizing the camaraderie between them. Yet the majority of respondents were not convinced: 66 percent of Aqaba GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that VEO members always look after each other, while 28 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 67). Despite the poor reputation of ISIS fighters in Aqaba, some respondents believed that local male youths would remain vulnerable to VEO messaging that glorifies weapons and violence, reflecting a broader male chauvinistic culture and the desire of young men to become proficient in the use of firearms.²⁵⁷

"I feel that ISIS is more organized than the radical groups that came before like Al Qa'ida in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which was less organized than ISIS is now. You feel like they are an organized army. They are able to reach many people in many different countries."

(Female, 43, Youth Program Coordinator, Aqaba)

²⁵⁵ "In the Al Kasasbeh video you can observe that at the moment of execution, all the soldiers of ISIS were tall and powerful." (Male, 29, Businessman, Aqaba)

²⁵⁶ Prince, S.J., 2016. 'WATCH: New ISIS video shows assault on Manbij, Syria with snipers and VBIEDs', Heavy, August 04, 2016.

²⁵⁷ "You are talking about impulsive youths, and their love for weapons. Guys love to show off their manhood by holding weapons. You can say that someone seduced those guys by offering them to hold weapons, teaching them how to use them and convincing them that it is something simple. Some guys have responded to that seduction and went off to Syria and Iraq in the past." (Female, 35, Youth Club Employee, Aqaba)

Figure 66. To what extent do you agree that members of VEOs are skilled fighters?

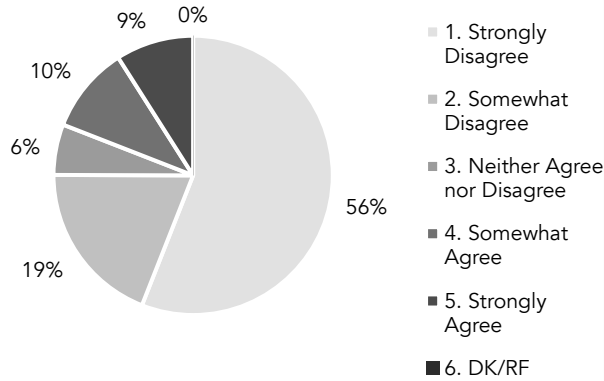


Figure 67. To what extent do you agree that members of VEOs always look after each other?

