

# Drivers And Barriers Impacting Propensity Toward Violent Extremism

## BALQA: TARGET LOCATION ANALYSIS



*View of the city of Salt, Balqa governorate.*

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

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## List of Acronyms

AQ:	Al Qa'ida
DK:	'Don't Know' (Guided Questionnaire Answers)
EU:	European Union
FSA:	Free Syrian Army
GQ:	Guided Questionnaire
IAF:	Islamic Action Front
ISIS:	Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham
JAF:	Jordanian Armed Forces
JD:	Jordanian Dinar
JN:	Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) <sup>1</sup>
MB:	Muslim Brotherhood
MP:	Member of Parliament
RF:	'Refuse to Answer' (Guided Questionnaire Answers)
UK:	United Kingdom
VE:	Violent Extremism
VEO:	Violent Extremist Organization

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<sup>1</sup> 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

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Balqa has witnessed a growing rejection of actors and opinions viewed as religiously radical, including violent extremist organizations (VEOs), most notably the Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham (ISIS) and the local Salafist Jihadist community. In fact, 71 percent of Balqa Guided Questionnaire (GQ) respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Salafist Jihadists in their community, while only 12 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Salafist Jihadists in their community. However, Salafist Jihadist religious leaders remain influential among some segments of the local population and there is evidence that Salafist Jihadists have targeted and mentored local youths, both online and locally, and provided them with opportunities to integrate in their communities and obtain work. In fact, concerns



over high youth unemployment and limited support for job seekers are widespread, with many identifying these as key factors driving propensity toward violent extremism (VE). In particular, vulnerable individuals who were previously drug users and/or involved in crime, in addition to other individuals marginalized from society, such as those lacking strong tribal connections, are viewed as especially vulnerable to being targeted by Salafist Jihadists and ultimately, VEOs. For instance, Salafist Jihadist leaders in Baqa'a refugee camp, some of whom are reportedly affiliated with ISIS, have provided local youths with employment opportunities and other forms of support. Notably, some respondents confirmed that they have been in a position to report such vulnerable individuals to the authorities, although perceived poor relations with the authorities, a lack of knowledge of how to best contact the authorities, and fear of the negative consequences that their family members might face currently obstruct effective cooperation.

There are also growing concerns that Syrian refugees are putting pressure on access to employment opportunities and government services, especially healthcare and education services, and pushing up prices. Such grievances could further increase tensions with Syrian refugees especially as financial concerns resulting from the high and rising cost of living were identified as key drivers of recruitment into VEOs. Growing frustrations with persisting economic concerns are also increasing resentment toward the central government. In fact, support for the government and Royal Court is often linked to financial support programs and anti-corruption efforts, while opposition is generally linked to perceived high levels of corruption among central and local government officials. Much of the support for the government and Royal Court also stems from confidence in the ability of the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) to protect Jordan, and in particular since border controls have been tightened along the Syrian-Jordanian border. However, serious concerns persist that security conditions in Jordan might deteriorate. Most view ISIS as posing a serious and direct threat to Jordan, in particular since March 2016, when the government announced the discovery of ISIS sleeper cells in neighboring Irbid governorate, which is also reflected in some locals acquiring weapons to protect themselves. While the national security and stability of Jordan is a priority for most, there are concerns that the government strategy to counter radicalization is excessively focused on physical security and that the government has been restricting political and civil freedoms, for instance by putting increasing pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). In fact, perceived political

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disenfranchisement is on the rise and many have lost faith that petitioning the government and/or voting can lead to change.

While most locals maintain that religious and violent extremism are limited phenomena that have been exaggerated by the media, many believe that both are on the rise, with many attributing this to radical religious education and preaching at mosques, schools, and universities. The increasing radicalization among locals is also reflected in growing anti-Christian sentiment and Muslim-Christian tensions, most noticeably in Salt. In fact, although 55 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims, as many as 41 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed. However, the entrenched tribal system in Balqa largely constitutes a significant barrier to both religious and violent extremism. Extremist voices of any kind stand out as apart from the norm and are therefore rejected through social pressure as well as through cooperation with the security services and, in some instances, even taking direct punitive measures against religious and violent extremists who have broken the law.

## 1.0 ISLAMIST AND VEO SUPPORT

### 1.1 SUPPORT FOR VEOs

Locals increasingly reject most actors that are perceived as being negatively involved in the Syrian conflict and/or as religiously radical, while support for Hamas and the MB has historically been, and remains strong.

The vast majority of locals oppose ISIS, AQ, and Salafist Jihadists, although opposition to Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) (JN) was notably weaker. There has been a growing perception of most VEOs that are active in Syria as guilty of atrocities and involved in a murky conflict where the goals, actions, and funding of VEOs has become increasingly suspicious to locals, who have withdrawn their support as a result. This has also impacted on support for the local Salafist Jihadist community, which is increasingly viewed as religiously radical, and tainted by the harsh implementation of Sharia law by VEOs in Syria and Iraq, most notably ISIS, although, in contrast, the Salafist Quietist community appears to have benefited from its stance in support of pacifism and against participation in jihad in Syria.

There is notable support for Hamas, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and the Salafist Quietists among locals. Support for Hamas mainly stems from a widespread sense of solidarity with the plight of the Palestinian people, and opposition to Israel, although support was unsurprisingly found to be the strongest among West Bank Jordanian locals living in Baqa'a refugee camp. In particular, support for the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the MB, is also strong among locals, which is largely viewed as constituting a barrier to recruitment into VEOs, as it presents a peaceful and political alternative to joining VEOs, although many are therefore concerned over growing government pressure on the MB.

*"Since ISIS appeared things have changed. Some people are saying, go fight with JN but don't go to join ISIS... What is happening in Syria is showing people how bloody the situation can get and it makes them want to become more moderate."*

*(Female, 32, Activist, Amman)*

**The perception of ISIS as responsible for public atrocities has increased opposition to ISIS but also appears to have increased support for JN.**

There has been a growing perception of ISIS as inhumane and guilty of committing atrocities in too public a manner, in particular as a result of the VEO's public displays of violence, to which locals oppose. The vast majority (80 percent) of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is opposition to ISIS in their community, while a significant minority (14 percent) reported that there is support for ISIS (see Figure 2 below). The growing perception of ISIS as brutal appears to have shifted support to JN, which is viewed as more moderate in its application of violence and ideologically.<sup>1</sup> While the activities of JN might be equally as violent on the ground in Syria, the group is commended in being less public in its displays of

<sup>1</sup> "Some see ISIS and JN as terrorist groups... [Some] don't have an opinion on ISIS and JN, and some see that JN is better than ISIS. There isn't one opinion in my area; it depends. Religiously, they feel that JN is more moderate than ISIS." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

violence.<sup>2</sup> Support for JN among influential religious leaders has also driven support for JN among their followers, for instance in Baqa'a refugee camp, and support for JN was also reaffirmed by prominent leaders such as Al Maqdisi and Abu Qatada.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, 63 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is opposition to JN in their community, while 28 percent reported that there is support (see Figure 2 below) While there has historically been some support for Al Qa'ida (AQ) in Balqa and locals left to fight with AQ in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and even though many view JN as representing AQ in Syria, support for AQ is lower than for JN: 75 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is opposition to AQ in their community, while 18 percent reported that there is support for the VEO (see Figure 2 below).

While support for JN is greater than support for ISIS, there continues to be relatively significant support for ISIS in Salt.<sup>4</sup> Some have estimated that hundreds of individuals left Salt to join ISIS and locals continue to express support for ISIS in private, with individuals still planning to leave Salt to join VEOs, although some friends and family members have been making efforts to prevent them from leaving.<sup>5</sup> In particular, messages that promote the political, financial, and military strength of ISIS have resonated with a segment of the local population,<sup>6</sup> which views ISIS as a regional success story and role model. However, some others remain skeptical, explaining that ISIS has made effective use of the media to project the illusion of greater control than the VEO in fact has.<sup>7</sup> There is some evidence that ISIS is changing its image to appeal to a more moderate audience and, for instance, has become less religiously radical in tone in the media, appealing to political rather than religious rhetoric, which is likely to help the VEO improve its image locally and regain support from among JN supporters.<sup>8</sup> Notably, events in Syria have negatively

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<sup>2</sup> "There is less opposition to JN because they have not as publicly committed crimes as ISIS. They might have committed similarly horrific crimes but they were not as public and as ugly as those committed by ISIS." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>3</sup> "Generally people in the camp are with JN and not ISIS. Some cases found themselves closer to ISIS, considering their leaders announced they're following ISIS, like Abu Muhammad Al Tahawi, who started as a follower of JN, however following the media hype on ISIS victories, he was smitten and announced following ISIS, and with him he influenced his own followers. In contrast, Abu Muhammad Al Maqdisi and Abu Qatada are supporting JN." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>4</sup> "I believe that ISIS supporters are a bigger group than those that actually joined the fight in Syria." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>5</sup> "I have seen from my conversations with people, their relatives, daily dealings, that many people are supportive of ISIS in Salt... People are showing more support for ISIS, for many reasons. Hundreds of people have left to join jihad with ISIS. I know people that are planning to go to join jihad today. I have heard of people that are trying to prevent their friends and family members from leaving." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>6</sup> "Anyone who is looking for a strong representative [might be vulnerable to radicalization]. ISIS portrays itself as strong and violent. People who are looking to succeed, whether positively or negatively, and who have a thirst for power might be drawn to this." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>7</sup> "JN has more control in Syria now. ISIS was in Iraq originally and JN in Syria for AQ. JN has more control than ISIS, however ISIS occupied one specific area and used media hype, filming their violent endeavors, the killings, to give the illusion of control. This gives the impression that ISIS is controlling the world and not just Raqqa." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>8</sup> "Now I believe they took another turn. In the media, ISIS is disappearing. The process of intimidation regarding this thought is diminishing. I believe that they got what they wanted. So if this shift in impact continues, I don't think it will have an impact in the same way... Moreover, from what I see in the media, the effect of extremism is becoming less,

impact on support for both ISIS and JN among the wider population, with many denouncing both groups as radical, and some citing the high numbers of deserters as evidence of growing disillusionment with their conduct in Syria and Iraq.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, numerous rumors of foreign interference in the Syrian conflict, most notably that the US, Israel, and European countries might have created ISIS, have also damaged support for the VEO,<sup>10</sup> which is a view that is held by some locals, including some government officials.<sup>11</sup>

*"They are very few people in my area [who are supportive of VEOs], but I believe they are with JN. After Moath Kasasbeh was killed, people started to talk about them like a balanced group, although they kill people. As for those associated with ISIS, they are very few, they can't be visible among people. Any proof of their presence should be taken seriously. So they are present but have no influence but I believe there are more JN supporters."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

**With the public murder of Jordanian pilot Moath Kasasbeh ISIS is viewed as having crossed a red line, as a result of which support for the VEO declined.**

The killing of Jordanian pilot Moath Kasasbeh by ISIS reduced support for ISIS among most locals, although some local Salafist Jihadists supported the killing,<sup>12</sup> for instance because they viewed him as a servant of an infidel government that opposes the Islamic State.<sup>13</sup> In fact, when ISIS released the video of

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especially when you follow the news, local and international news, you can see that. The wording used by ISIS is becoming less apparent. Now they are using political terms more than religious ones." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>9</sup> "One of the guys left to join ISIS came back to Salt... He works driving a taxi now. Now he ignores me, although I tried to get him out. He left ISIS because he was shocked of what they do there. Even ISIS and JN and the way how they convince people to kill." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>10</sup> "The US, Israel, and European countries are likely to have created ISIS around 10 years ago, otherwise would it make sense that a few pick-up trucks can capture Mosul and that a group of Iraqis would leave their weapons and run? Also, where were these fighters trained? Is it possible that the US who follows Osama Bin Laden, and was able to get him in his house in Pakistan, and was present in Tora Bora, and other persons was not aware that thousands of individuals trained an army? Where did the weapons come from? How did they purchase them?" (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>11</sup> "There are doubts about everything that is known as ISIS, the way they act, the executions they carry out, the mental state, are these people meeting and discussing how to execute people, or have they been trained to do so, did they plan it themselves or just carry it out under their name? How did they direct for example the execution of Moath Kassasbeh? The methods of torture for example, were they birthed by people that gathered from different countries? These giants, where did they stay? Where did they plan? Where did these Sharia courts come from? And the spending of money? All these details are something that is not easy to process mentally if they were not supported in a way, and trained on all these aspects, and then left... ISIS was founded to serve the interests and goals of the states that have an interest to destroy the Arab states, or parts of them, and these plans are ongoing in my opinion." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>12</sup> "All Salafists agreed to what happened to Moath Kasasbeh, I knew that through our conversations." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>13</sup> "In Salt, the Salafist Jihadists were against Al Maqdisi negotiating for Moath, as Moath was serving an infidel government against the Islamic State, and he himself was an infidel." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

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the killing of Kasasbeh in February 2015, recruitment into VEOs in Syria from Balqa noticeably slowed, although both support for, and recruitment into, ISIS continued.<sup>14</sup> More specifically, respondents explained that locals opposed the murder because of the public dissemination of the act and, in particular, because Kasasbeh was also a Sunni Muslim. Local support for Kasasbeh was also demonstrated by ultimately futile attempts by locals to free the pilot through social networks between locals and ISIS members.<sup>15</sup> In response to the murder, the Salafist Jihadist movement in Jordan denounced the action by ISIS, although it has since reportedly returned to advocating support for the VEO. However, some members of the Salafist community also supported the view of Al Maqdisi that the murder of Kasasbeh was orchestrated by the Jordanian security services to spread fear among the population.<sup>16</sup> This reinforces views held more widely across the country, that national and international intelligence departments have been involved in the creation of ISIS with the aim of achieving gains domestically and internationally. Additionally, the murder of Kasasbeh drained support for ISIS because it increased the perception that the VEO poses a direct threat to Jordan, to which the discovery by the government of an ISIS sleeper cell in Irbid in March 2016 further contributed, highlighting that for the majority of the population, even among more radical elements, national pride and a desire for stability and security in Jordan ultimately constitute a barrier to support for VEOs.<sup>17</sup>

*"When the video of Moath Kasasbeh was published, people got very upset in general. They were against this action because he is a Sunni Muslim. This agitated even ISIS supporters. The Salafist Jihadist movement in Jordan also condemned the burning of Moath Kasasbeh, however after a while they went back to supporting the extremist groups."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

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<sup>14</sup> "After Moath Kasasbeh, there was a shock, especially for Islamists. Many reconsidered joining these groups after the burning of Kasasbeh, however there is a big group that decided to join jihad as well, even after the incident." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>15</sup> "There were some attempts by people from Salt to try and free Moath Kasasbeh when ISIS captured him. There were some relations between people here and ISIS. I tried through them to solve Moath's case and bring him back to Jordan. What we saw on Roya television was so cartoonish. This guy who went there, what's his name, Maqdisi, they didn't want him to go. The one who can join ISIS from Salt should be agreed upon from ISIS. We have one who does that here in Salt. I felt that Hazem knew about him. I read a book by Abu Baker Naji. I read a lot. I sent them a book by Mohammed Abu Wahhab, then I started to talk to them about Moath, when he felt I was trying to get information, he changed his tone and changed the conversation." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>16</sup> "Even Abu Mohd Al Maqdisi, who negotiated on behalf of the Jordanian government to free Moath Kasasbeh, said that [the video showing his death] is a fear mongering technique used by the state, and all terrorist acts are the creation of the security forces." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>17</sup> "VE became less of a problem in my town recently, especially after Moath Kasasbeh died because it showed the true face of those people. In addition, I see that in general people here are refusing such people because the general thought here is to follow what the majority think. I see now that conversations are different between youths. Now they clearly disagree with ISIS, while previously it was different. Now they feel like there is a real threat to their society and to their people. They felt that the Jordanian government is now facing a real problem. They felt the real threat of what is happening in Syria. This happened during my conversations with many people." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

## Support for Hamas is strong but many have become wary of its involvement in the Syrian conflict.

Most respondents indicated that there is support for Hamas in their communities and, in particular, support for the VEO is substantial in West Bank Jordanian areas of Balqa,<sup>18</sup> and among MB members.<sup>19</sup> For instance, there is strong support for Hamas in Baqa'a refugee camp, where the VEO is viewed as being affiliated to the larger MB,<sup>20</sup> and as being involved in a legitimate resistance struggle against the occupation of Israel.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, support for Hamas was especially strong during Operation Protective Edge in 2014, when graffiti and Islamic slogans in support of Gaza could be seen across Balqa.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, 55 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Hamas in their community, although 38 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Hamas in their community (see Figure 2 below). Opposition to Hamas largely stems from the growing perception that the VEO has lost its focus, both as a result of the perception of infighting with Fatah,<sup>23</sup> and its involvement in the Syrian conflict, as many regard resistance to Israel as more of a priority than fighting the Assad Regime. As a consequence, some locals have a negative perception of West Bank Jordanian fighters who have gone to fight in Syria, as there is a sense they should be engaged in Israel instead. The involvement of Hamas in the Syrian conflict has also drained support for the VEO, for instance because locals oppose its perceived relationship with the Assad Regime, Iran, Hezbollah, and Qatar, and accuse the group of constantly shifting its alliances and policies. While most respondents reported that locals differentiate Hamas from other VEOs, and view Hamas as a legitimate resistance group rather than as a VEO,<sup>24</sup> it is also notable that some youths no longer draw this distinction and view Hamas as a VEO.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Hamas is related to the MB. It is a branch of the MB in Palestine. There are some areas where support for Hamas is greater. Specifically, in the Baqa'a refugee camp for instance. It is a political armed group that is fighting the occupation. The majority of people from Balqa are East Jordanians and so they do not support the Palestinian cause. Even though they are radical, there is support because Hamas is seen as taking action against the occupation and there is support for that." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>19</sup> "People here have opinions; we have the MB here so for sure they support Hamas." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa); "In Jordan, the MB is with Hamas. It is known." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>20</sup> "Hamas, according to people in the camp, are a resistance faction that is defending Palestine. Hamas is part of the MB." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>21</sup> "Hamas is a resistance group that is legitimate and is in Palestine, where there is an occupation, we all know of that." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>22</sup> "There was graffiti supporting Hamas, and Islamic slogans, during the Gaza war." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>23</sup> "I would respect Hamas for defending Palestine, however personally I feel Hamas is extremist when it comes to the internal Palestinian situation." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>24</sup> "Hamas can't be included in these groups. They have their own cause regarding Palestine. So you can't relate Hamas with extremism. I believe that people in Salt do not think so. They don't put them all together and they differentiate between them clearly." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>25</sup> "Hamas is different, regardless what observations and comments we have. Hamas is a resistance group. They might have fatwas and actions we don't agree with, however they aren't considered violent extremists as JN and ISIS. I speak to a lot of people, especially the youth and I have noticed from my conversations that some say that Hamas is like ISIS and JN, however for most, Hamas is different." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

*"People feel differently about Hamas, especially now, because of the relationship between Hamas and Qatar and the Syrian regime. How they were close with Hezbollah and Iran, the Shias, is also viewed negatively. Hamas keeps on changing its alliances and policies and this is decreasing its popularity. Some people stopped supporting Hamas following that, even some Palestinian Sunni Muslims. I am telling you this from my conversations with people. People are changing their alliances and support."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

**Hizb ut-Tahrir is viewed as a threat to national unity and stability, although the party has a low profile and most locals are unaware of its activities within Jordan.**

Most respondents expressed opposition to Hizb ut-Tahrir, explaining that the goals of the party and violent mindset of its members are a threat to national unity and stability. Accordingly, 53 percent of Ma'an GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Hizb ut-Tahrir in their community, while 15 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Hizb ut-Tahrir in their community (see Figure 2 below). Support for the party is the greatest among members of the Salafist Jihadist community, although it lacks much of a profile within Jordan, where some respondents even suspected that the party might not have a branch. While the group is banned in Jordan, its spokesperson in Jordan has been Mamdouh Abu Sawa Qitaishat.<sup>26</sup> However, it is important to note that 15 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is 'neither support nor opposition' to Hizb ut-Tahrir in their community, which is likely the result of the group's extremely low profile in Jordan, as a result of which most locals are poorly informed about the group and respondents were hesitant to voice opinions.

*"The Al Tahrir Party believes in using weapons, they have to be stopped. We talked about the Jordanian identity. We have to be together, supporting our leaders and believe in it. I am not talking about the benefits we get from our leaders. I am talking about them using more transparency with us, responding to the worries of citizens. This party's ideology is based on using weapons, I believe that if there is a Jordanian who believes in what this party believes in, then there is a huge problem here."*

*(Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)*

**Opposition to Salafist Jihadist community is widespread, mainly because the Syrian conflict and local events have contributed to a perception of the community as radical.**

The presence of Salafist Jihadists in Balqa is reported to have noticeably increased after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, and Salafist Jihadists are still commonly seen at religious gatherings at mosques, weddings, and funerals.<sup>27</sup> In particular, the Salafist Jihadist community has seized upon religious

<sup>26</sup> Khilafah 2014. 'Demo in Jordan: Reject the Geneva Conspiracy, the Tyrannical System and Treacherous Coalition', Khilafah, January 25, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> "After the Iraq invasion, the presence of religious extremists increased... now you can see these radical groups walking around the streets very clearly and almost normally and they speak to people. They think of themselves as

celebrations to increase their profile, hold speeches, and spread their ideology.<sup>28</sup> Salafist Jihadists have also held public demonstrations in Balqa, the main purpose of which has been to advocate for trials and better prison conditions on behalf of imprisoned Salafist Jihadists. There have been reports that Salafist Jihadists have been arrested without evidence against them or trial,<sup>29</sup> and that some have also been humiliated and mistreated while in prison, which has led some locals to conclude that the government response to Salafist Jihadists is excessively harsh and risks pushing members of the community to further radicalize and oppose the government.<sup>30</sup> Notably, some believe that the number of Salafist Jihadists in Balqa has increased, mainly on the basis of an increase in the number of locals in Pakistani and Afghani clothing, although these also include members of non-violent political and Islamist groups.<sup>31</sup> However, Salafist Jihadists are increasingly viewed as excessively radical and intolerant, as a result of events in Syria, such as the strict implementation of Sharia law by VEOs, but also local events, for instance when they instruct locals on how to conduct themselves, especially at prayer times or funerals, which has led to some to view them as arrogant and imposing.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, 71 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Salafist Jihadists in their community, while only 12 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Salafist Jihadists in their community (see Figure 2 below).

In addition to strengthened security measures, which have reportedly reduced the numbers of worshippers at some mosques at which Salafist Jihadists preach, the departure of some of its members for Syria, and the imprisonment of some others, which have weakened the movement, there has also been a social rejection of groups perceived as radical more generally.<sup>33</sup> In particular, Salafist Jihadists are viewed as promoting a violent interpretation of Islam and the Qur'an, for instance through narratives

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sheikhs or Salafist Jihadists, you see them in mosques, in weddings, or in mourning houses." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>28</sup> "In Salt, I used to see some people who were young, in their prime, who were able to get married and be responsible, but they unfortunately spent most of their time learning the Salafist ideology. For example, they spent most of their time in mosques. Also, if there were a death or a religious occasion, you would see that their activities increased. So you would see them use these occasions to preach and give religious teachings." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>29</sup> "Most of the extremists in Jordan are arrested without trial. They don't have evidence or accusations against them. They only arrest them for being religious." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>30</sup> "The Salafist Jihadists protest in Balqa and their main issue is to demand better conditions for Salafist Jihadist prisoners in Jordan. Some of them have been taken and no one knows why. They are held without a trial for several years. They complain about the way that people are treated in prisons. They are humiliated. Their beards are being shaved. Mostly the Salafist Jihadists who are held, no one knows why they are in jail. There are tens of people who are held in Jordan. We are not talking about large numbers." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>31</sup> "We are seeing more Pakistani and Afghani attire. We are seeing more people in these outfits. Some of these are from the MB, but some are also non-ideological Muslims." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>32</sup> "On some occasions like death cases, [youths who joined Salafist Jihadist groups in Salt] would tell people for example that they are burying people the wrong way or that they are praying the wrong way. They were very negative and very radical. They think that their own way is the right way." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>33</sup> "The presence of Salafist Jihadists in Jordan has decreased. Many left to Syria; many were imprisoned because of the strict security measures. There has also been a social rejection of these groups." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

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related to Islamic scholars, such as Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah,<sup>34</sup> who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as advocating for an excessively strict and false implementation of Sharia law, for instance one that involves failing to account for the requirements that must be fulfilled before a verdict can take place and punishment can be applied in a particular case, such as that of adultery. However, above all else, the rejection of Salafist Jihadists appears to be driven by concerns that these groups could destabilize the country and security conditions could deteriorate as a result, as they did in Iraq and Syria,<sup>35</sup> and as a result of which VEOs including ISIS and JN, are largely viewed as extremist.<sup>36</sup> Most notably, one respondent reported that Salafist Jihadists, among other groups, were blamed for attacks on government buildings in the governorate in 2011 and 2012.<sup>37</sup> However, there mainly appears to be confidence that the Salafist Jihadist community in Jordan is ultimately interested in maintaining the security and stability of the country,<sup>38</sup> even despite perceived efforts by the government to use Salafist Jihadists as a tool to scare the public so as to impose its policies.<sup>39</sup>

*"The Salafist Jihadist depends on the violent interpretation of religion and the Qur'an. They believe that the sword, the strict implementation of Islamic rules, should spread Islam as they interpret it. They believe Islam is a religion of tolerance and acceptance, however this does not come as a main pillar in their ideology. For example, when it comes to adultery in Islam, for the punishment to take place, many things need to be taken into consideration, and usually the punishment by death is the last resort. However for the Salafist Jihadist, it is very easy to pronounce someone as an adulterer and kill them, which is what we see in Syria every day."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

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<sup>34</sup> "[Salafist Jihadist rhetoric] is mostly about inciting people, and calling on them to hate others, and they also promote violence. They also depend on Qur'anic verses in their speeches and they formulate it to benefit their own ideas, but mostly they use Hadith verses, the Prophet's words, especially those related to Ibn Taymiyyah. This is what they mostly use." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>35</sup> "After the failure of the Arab Spring, there is a greater awareness of Islamic groups in Salt, that Jordan needs to stay safe and secure. It is in no one's benefit that Jordan is destroyed as Syria, Iraq and other countries in the Arab Spring were." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>36</sup> "After what we have seen in Syria and Iraq, people view these groups as a source of destruction. This includes everyone fighting in Syria, including ISIS, JN, Jaish Al Hor, even leftists in beards. Everyone is seen as an extremist at this point." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>37</sup> "We have Salafists in Salt and they are mainly Salafist Jihadists. In 2011, 2012... there was an attack on the intelligence headquarters by Salafist Jihadists. In Al Baqa'a, there were the Salafists who vandalized state centers. There were also groups of youths who vandalized and used drugs. No one spoke to me directly, however I witnessed the attack. I discussed the incident with people, and some thought that it was Salafist Jihadists who carried out the attack. The group was caught and arrested." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>38</sup> "Salafist Jihadists in Salt don't accept that Jordan is a civil state, however they don't want to rise up here because they ultimately do not want to disrupt the safety and security of Jordan, although there are dormant cells here in Jordan." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>39</sup> "Salafist Jihadists are not legal in Jordan, of course not, however the state uses them to impose its policies. They would use them for fear mongering and to scare the public." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

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**Prominent Salafist Jihadist religious leaders are influential among some segments of the local population, target and mentor local youths, and thereby contribute to radicalization.**

Despite strong opposition to the movement, Balqa is viewed as an enabling environment for Salafist Jihadism,<sup>40</sup> and Salafist Jihadists are influential in particular communities in Balqa through their role as respected religious and community leaders, for instance at the mosque on Street 60 in Salt, at the mosque in the Aalbaqie area near Shamleh School in Salt,<sup>41</sup> in Salt Qasabah,<sup>42</sup> at Abu Bakr Mosque in Baqa'a,<sup>43</sup> at Omar Mosque in Baqa'a refugee camp, in Shweih Al Gharbi in Baqa'a, and in Ain Al Basha.<sup>44</sup> In fact, while the government closely monitors Salafist Jihadist activities at mosques, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs appoints imams,<sup>45</sup> respondents reported that a number of the imams at mosques in Balqa are Salafist Jihadists. However, in contrast to Salt and Baqa'a, less urban areas in Balqa are reportedly less populated by Salafist Jihadists. One respondent explained that preachers, and above them Salafist Jihadist sheikhs, are viewed as respected authorities that follow the intellectual leadership of higher-level leaders, such as Al Maqdisi, Abu Qatada, and Al Tahawi,<sup>46</sup> and are seen as role models, to turn to for guidance and emulate.<sup>47</sup> In fact, several respondents confirmed that recruitment into VEOs occurs through influential religious leaders and Salafist Jihadist cells in parts of Balqa, such as Baqa'a refugee camp.<sup>48</sup> In addition, to more prominent leaders, Salafist Jihadist youths, some of whom joined

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<sup>40</sup> "I think that Al Salt is more welcoming as a city for Salafist Jihadists, Ma'an and Irbid too." (Male, 29, Journalist, Zarqa)

<sup>41</sup> "There's a mosque in Salt for Salafists, near Shamleh School, Salafists pray in it." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>42</sup> "In Salt Qasabah you can find radical people more than on the outskirts of Salt. They are located there and they are so close. In general people living there are more extreme. You can't see this in villages or on the outskirts of Balqa. It is important for them to gather and meet. They want their thoughts to spread." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>43</sup> "Abu Bakr Mosque in Baqa'a, for example, has a strong Salafist Jihadist presence... [The Salafist Jihadists] once started a demonstration from the mosque, which was about improving the situation of prisoners. They claim that the security forces provoke them and humiliate them, and some are detained without trial. Some don't have good living conditions or visiting hours." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>44</sup> "In the camp, you can say especially in the beginning of the camp, also in Shweih Al Gharbi, which is located on the outskirts of the area, also closer to Ain Al Basha, is where you can find the Salafist Jihadists meet. They also meet at Omar mosque. It's like a kitchen. This is where they are brainwashed. This is in general where they are located. Anyone who wants to go to pray can notice them in the mosque." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>45</sup> "In mosques, in general they are not allowed to speak, but they use the period between prayers, where they are not supervised. So they use that time to speak to people directly. You can also find that the imam of the mosque is fearful of such people to speak in mosques because the Ministry of Religious Affairs here mostly appoints imams in Jordan. They don't approve of Salafist Jihadist thoughts." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>46</sup> "The Salafist Jihadist sheikh is an authority to his disciples and is himself a disciple of higher-level leaders. At the top you have Mohammad Al Maqdisi in Zarqa, Abu Qatada, and Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi in Irbid. Then we have the preachers and knowledgeable people in Salafist Jihadist groups, then the younger people. They have a hierarchy that is based on knowledge in religion." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>47</sup> "People join them if they want to be religious. There is not a recruitment process to become a Salafist Jihadist. They are well respected and people might want to become like them and consider them as role models." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>48</sup> "[People are recruited] through hidden cells of Salafism, also through following people who are religious and who visibly pray every day." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

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VEOs in Syria, were also involved in recruitment activities in the early years of the Syrian conflict.<sup>49</sup> One respondent also added that recruitment into Salafist Jihadist groups is aided by the fact that they accept anyone, are not selective in terms of who can join them,<sup>50</sup> provide economic support, and offer a strong community, in which individuals can flourish and express themselves. Notably, some respondents also highlighted that the Salafist Jihadist community increasingly isolates its members from the rest of the local community, mainly through praying separately from others, as a result of which its members are difficult to influence, even by close family members.<sup>51</sup>

While confirming that the government rejects the Salafist Jihadist ideology and has arrested some imams for the content of their sermons, several respondents complained that the government is not doing enough to review the content of sermons and remove Salafist Jihadist imams from positions of influence in mosques,<sup>52</sup> with some also reporting that radical religious leaders also use mosques, such as one in Ain Al Basha, to hold meetings outside of prayer times and in secret.<sup>53</sup> In addition, some are critical that the government does not apply more stringent restrictions on religious teachings and materials, such as books by Muhammad Ibn Abd Al Wahhab.<sup>54</sup> Since youths who have become radicalized have become accustomed to frequenting mosques and religious associations, respondents also highlighted the importance of harnessing religious events and organizations to counter radical religious narratives and spread moderate messages.<sup>55</sup> As a consequence of the perceived strong influence of religious leaders

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<sup>49</sup> "I can distinguish the Salafist Jihadists from their attire. The youths who joined the fight and returned are in religious positions in Salt. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, yes they were actively calling on people to join jihad." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>50</sup> "Anyone who wants to join the Salafist Jihadist groups is welcome, they are not selective in who they target." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>51</sup> "I heard that the Salafist Jihadists have their own mosques now and they pray separately from others. In the past couple of years, the Salafist Jihadists have been separating in prayer from other Muslims on Street 60. I might have seen something like that." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>52</sup> "Imams of mosques are all Salafists. I don't know where the government is in stopping this. I know of an imam in a mosque in Salt, he is known and he preaches to people at Friday prayers in Salt and he is a Salafist but he was arrested. There must be a way to review the context of religious preaching, how they are being presented to the public, and who is giving them." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>53</sup> "There is an area for example close to Al Baqa'a refugee camp called Ain Al Basha, I know a Sufi mosque over there, two brothers built the mosque and they close and open it using their keys and they have a sheikh there and no one knows what this sheikh teaches or tells people. Where is the government? That is just one example, there are others." (Male, 32, Construction Worker, Zarqa)

<sup>54</sup> "The groups embrace them at first, through meetings, conversations, and religious preaching in mosques. Sometimes I attended a prayer in a mosque. I look at what they say and how they say it. I told an imam once that what he said was wrong, the books they use, for instance Mohammed Abed Al Wahhab's book is discussed in mosques." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>55</sup> "The main thing is to make use of mosques and religious associations. Most of the youth became used to going to Friday prayers so these societies should be used for a good cause and change radical thoughts among the youth." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

who act as role models, respondents also highlighted the importance of supporting male youths in finding religiously moderate or neutral social leaders as alternative role models and success stories.<sup>56</sup>

*"The Salafist Jihadists are interested in communicating with people, empowering them economically, and building a social environment. They provide a place for people to express themselves. It could be anywhere, in the streets. Once the person goes to the mosque with the Salafist Jihadists, they are recruited."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

Some women also contribute to spreading Salafist Jihadist messages and thereby create an enabling environment for VE but parents are also in a unique position to prevent recruitment into VEOs.

Women also play an important role in the Salafist Jihadist community and contribute to disseminating Salafist Jihadist messaging, for instance at funerals or prayer times, among other public events,<sup>57</sup> but also at home, where they pass information on to their children. As a consequence, women and mothers play a key role in contributing to the creation of an enabling environment for VE in their communities. On the flipside, mothers are also viewed as key in encouraging moderation among their children, for instance when they communicate moderate religious messages, select schools that foster a moderate religious environment, and supervise their children.<sup>58</sup> However, several respondents highlighted that, while families in general, and mothers in particular, are influential in the upbringing of their children, they are sometimes powerless in preventing the recruitment of their children into VEOs, for instance because individuals have been radicalized and convinced to join a VEO by their friends, which highlights that there

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<sup>56</sup> "Create social leaders to raise awareness of the youths and to guide and direct them. You need people who can deal with the youths, who know what the youths' direction is. We could observe the youths, see what problems they have, and aim to fix them to prevent them from joining extremist groups." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>57</sup> "Also among women [who joined Salafist Jihadist groups] there was a weird way of thinking. When we talk about radicalism, we immediately assume that only men are accused of it, but women are guilty too. Women can be radical and hold the Salafist ideology as well. For example, when you go to a mourning house or you attend a religious preaching, you can see that some women have radical thoughts and are very extreme. They take advantage of such situations and they would tell stories and give examples about how Islam should be but they come from a radical background. Their stories come from an extremist background and mostly are not true... some women are so eloquent and they take advantage of this. In Amman and in Salt, I have attended many mourning houses and I saw those women. They take advantage of the situation in the name of religion. They also collect donations after the end of their preaching, which is something that is completely wrong. You should not do something like that. There should be supervision." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>58</sup> "I believe that mothers play a role, how they raise their kids and how they see God and also how they don't supervise their kids and follow them during their university time. We live in a time that is very open to other societies and we have to supervise our kids, we have to select a good school with a good environment that is able to give good religious teaching, this is the main thing." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

are also substantial limitations in the role that mothers, and parents, can play in obstructing the recruitment of their children into VEOs.<sup>59</sup>

*"This so-called preacher might tell a story and a woman attending would memorize it and pass it on to her family. This will reflect on her parenting with her kids. They think that they have to teach religion with radical spirit. You can see how those women tell their stories with a very extremist tone, like for example saying that Islam is now in danger and that we have to protect it and so on. Also when they pray, they keep saying: God please protect our people in Syria and in Iraq. This reflects in our kids and how we educate them and how we raise them."*

*(Female, 41, Academic, Balqa'a)*

**Opposition to Hezbollah is strong and mainly tied to its Shia identity and role in the Syrian conflict, although the VEO garners some lingering support as a result of its resistance to Israel.**

Most respondents indicated that there is strong opposition to Hezbollah in their communities, mainly due to a more general opposition to Shias, but also as a result of the perceived negative role that Hezbollah has played in the Syrian conflict, in particular because Hezbollah is viewed as engaging in the killing of innocent Muslims.<sup>60</sup> Notably, while most respondents indicated opposition to Hezbollah, some support for Hezbollah remains, largely as a result of strong opposition to Israel.<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, 58 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to, while 33 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Hezbollah in their community (see Figure 2 below).

*"Most people are against Hezbollah because they are Shias. However, there is appreciation for the fact that Hezbollah is a resistance to Israel and that they are defending their land and their country. They are the only resistance group that are publicly renouncing Israel and announcing their opposition. In this regard there is support for them. However, when you look at their intervention in Syria, killing, and being a part of this mess on the ground in Syria, then I don't see these actions as justifiable. They are killing innocent Arab and Muslim people."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

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<sup>59</sup> "I remember of a story of a Salafist Jihadist. His mother used to teach religion in school. So she is supposed to give the right image of religion. His upbringing should have been different. He joined a radical group and went to fight. His mom wasn't the reason behind his decision and neither his father. It was his friends who convinced him but in the end he came back." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>60</sup> "When Israel and Hezbollah were fighting, everyone was supporting Hezbollah, but now things have flipped, because of what happened with Syria, they are now against them." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>61</sup> "[Some see] Hamas and Hezbollah as resistance factions, some see Hezbollah as extremist and Hamas as a resistance faction, [and some see] Hamas as a resistance faction and Hezbollah as infidels... Some support Hezbollah because they haven't hurt Arab regimes and they fight Israel. Everyone has a different point of view." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

## 1.2 SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL AND NON-VIOLENT ISLAMIST GROUPS

While the Salafist Quietist community is less visible and active than the Salafist Jihadist community, there is greater support for Salafist Quietists than for Salafist Jihadists among locals.

While there is also a Salafist Quietist community in Salt, the Salafist Jihadist community has a higher profile,<sup>62</sup> and is therefore also perceived as larger, than the Salafist Quietist community. However, while Salafist Jihadists maintain a public presence in Salt, they remain in the minority and there is ultimately greater support for peaceful Islamist movements among locals more generally.<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, 53 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' support for Salafist Quietists in their community, while 33 percent reported that there is 'strong' or 'some' opposition to Salafist Quietists (see Figure 2 below). Salafist Quietists are also viewed as a barrier to recruitment into VEOs, as a result of their opposition to the Salafist Jihadist ideology, but also as a result of disagreements in regard to when the conditions for legitimate jihad are fulfilled in a particular context, most recently in Syria, where Salafist Quietists maintain that the conditions for jihad have not been fulfilled and jihad is therefore not justifiable.

*"The Salafist Quietists are a barrier to recruitment into VEOs. They are contradicting such groups. There is a huge conflict between these groups... Salafist Quietist groups think that Salafist Jihadists are blasphemous and infidels. They consider their jihad to be illogical. They don't consider people dying in Syria to be martyrs, as the conditions for jihad are not met."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

Despite its official stance against terrorism, the MB has indirectly driven recruitment into VEOs in Syria and there are concerns that government pressure on the MB risks radicalizing its members.

While the MB has stood behind the government and condemned terrorism and extremism in Syria, and some respondents maintained that the rhetoric of MB in Salt acts as a barrier to recruitment,<sup>64</sup> many respondents highlighted that the MB previously encouraged recruitment into VEOs in Syria by repeatedly condemning the Assad Regime and voicing support for VEOs in Syria, most notably JN, mainly from around 2013 to 2015.<sup>65</sup> Some MB members have also voiced support for ISIS, despite the official stance of

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<sup>62</sup> "The Salafists and preachers are the most active. There are two kinds of Salafists: Salafist Jihadists and Salafist preachers. Both are present in Salt. Most active people follow the Salafists Jihadists in Salt, and were attracted to go to Syria and Iraq. This is after 2011. I'm not sure if there were more people who are still here in Salt." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>63</sup> "There are Salafist Jihadist groups in Salt, however they aren't the main Islamic group in Salt. There are more regular Muslims in Salt, not violent, but peaceful and tolerant Muslims." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>64</sup> "The MB is opposed to ISIS in general; in some areas they are sympathetic, however in general they are against ISIS. This can be seen in the clashes within the MB, especially those that left the MB. This can be seen specifically in Salt. I see that the rhetoric of the MB wouldn't push people to join ISIS." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>65</sup> "From 2013 to the end of 2015 [peaceful Islamist groups] called on people to fight in Syria, for instance, the MB. However, yesterday in their statement they stood with the Jordanian state and condemned the terrorism and

the organization against the VEO. MB messages have therefore overlapped with VEO narratives in regard to the necessity of overthrowing the Assad Regime,<sup>66</sup> and some have even accused the MB of more direct involvement in strengthening the Syrian people against the regime.<sup>67</sup> While there is generally no overlap between MB members and Salafist Jihadists, the two groups share many religious ideas, such as encouraging jihad, as a result of which it is possible for MB members to become Salafist Jihadists and subsequently join VEOs via that route.<sup>68</sup>

Some respondents explained that failures in the MB leadership, programs, and communications are to blame for the MB indirectly driving recruitment into VEOs, for instance because internal fissures in the organization have contributed to the radicalization of some members as a result of an internal ideological outbidding dynamic, through which members also aim to appeal to a more radical and young demographic.<sup>69</sup> In addition, some respondents reported that the MB has become weaker, especially since the overthrow of Mohammad Morsi in Egypt, and mainly blamed political infighting within the MB as well as increasing government pressure for the weakened state of the organization. As a result, there are growing concerns that politically marginalized MB members might turn to extremism to make themselves heard, with respondents citing examples of MB members who they view as becoming increasingly radical,

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extremism in Syria. In 2013, they posted some pictures during the Arab Spring, with members in their militant attire and arms. This would affect people and promote terrorism, even if it only works on the ideology and not actions. Even the youths among MB members are being influenced." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>66</sup> "After Egypt, I feel that the MB is weaker. Yesterday they published a statement condemning the terrorist acts for example. We don't know if this is their political view, religious view, or whether they are rearranging internal issues. However, the MB agrees with ISIS in regards to the necessity of war against the Syrian regime." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>67</sup> "Syria, I would also blame the MB. The MB is against the Syrian regime, they are with Saddam Hussein, yet against Bashar Assad from a long time ago. They planned with other countries to strengthen the people against the regime." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>68</sup> "It can happen that people move from the MB to the Salafists. Some of my relatives, their father established the MB in Jordan, all of his sons are MB members, and now they have all joined groups such as AQ and other VEOs. One of them went to join ISIS in Syria... When the father of my relatives died, who established the MB, five or six years ago, they did a funeral for him and they leveled the grave with the ground and they didn't have a marker, which is very Salafist... In general, there is no overlap between the MB and the Salafist Jihadists but on a religious level they believe in the same things, like encouraging jihad, fasting during Ramadan, many things." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>69</sup> "I think that naturally these groups, the IAF and MB, they aim to direct the energy of youths toward political or preaching work. They worked on directing youths toward political work. This is positive in principle. However, whether they succeeded in this is another matter. They did not succeed because there is a problem in their programs and in their leadership and communication of their messages. Lately, considering the conflicts within the MB, we have seen that some extremist voices are rising. It is only voices, however without implementation. We are seeing extremism among the MB members, following the conflict within the MB itself. It is ideological extremism. We haven't heard this before. In my personal opinion the MB has an extremism problem among the youth. They should be directed toward political work. However lately I feel that the MB is failing and that the leadership is following the youth and not the other way around. In order to win their votes in the elections, they need to attract the youth and appeal to them with their speeches." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

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such as Zaki Bani Irsheid and Amjad Qorsha,<sup>70</sup> and going so far as to say that the MB could get to a point of carrying out attacks, citing their uncompromising approach at demonstrations in October 2012 as evidence.<sup>71</sup> Notably, some also blame inflexible and uncooperative MB members for greater pressure on the organization and therefore support the government, explaining that there should only be limited tolerance for MB members who reject the government and want to overthrow the monarchy. However, while radical members do pose a danger by indirectly driving VE, a weakened movement and pressure for moderation have also driven radical youths away from the MB and political processes and toward VEOs, which suggests that they are also in a position to constitute a barrier to recruitment, as they are in a position to pull members of a vulnerable demographic into the MB.

While some respondents explained that the MB does not have a strong presence in Balqa when compared to other parts of the country, mainly due to its West Bank Jordanian makeup, as a result of which the tribes from Balqa do not feel represented by the discourse of the MB,<sup>72</sup> support for the IAF was found to be strong. The vast majority (72 percent) of respondents reported that there is support for the IAF in their community, while a significant minority (19 percent) reported that there is opposition to the IAF in their community (see Figure 2 below).

*"I feel like the [MB] in Jordan is very weak. Maybe because of internal problems here in Jordan or because of the government's reaction against political religious movements. This may increase extremism, since radical people now can find a voice with others who have been marginalized or stopped from voicing their opinion, especially since the MB became weak. They are a political religious movement after all. I see now that the MB's plan has been withdrawn, and radicals became more powerful. They should work in politics in Jordan but we should not give them more of a voice. One of the leaders who is called [Zaki Bani Irsheid] Irsheid is out of prison now and he is against the government and works to convince people that our government is wrong and he wants to overthrow the government. He is well known here. He wants to see the King fall."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

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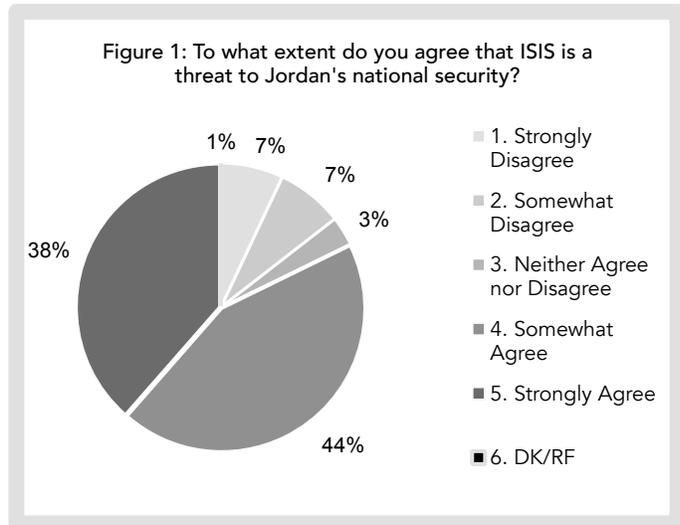
<sup>70</sup> "The MB is a gateway toward VE. In the beginning, Amjad Qorsha, for example, started soft, however now he posts fatwas and feels entitled to express more extremist thoughts. Amjad Qorsha is fighting everyone. He started softly. I wouldn't be surprised if he is dealing with violent extremists. He was a MB member and is becoming more extremist every day." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>71</sup> "I think of all of those as terrorists, they don't have to be bombing locations today, but they are working for the future. Their approach during the October demonstrations in Jordan in the Arab Spring was violent. The MB members don't accept others. They aren't carrying out attacks, although the MB could get to a point where they would kill and carry out attacks. They only want their way to be the way; they don't accept others." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>72</sup> "There is hardly a presence of the MB in Balqa. The MB took part in the demonstrations that started in 2011. The MB is mostly composed of Palestinians. Politically they don't have the discourse that the tribes are looking for. East Jordanians consider Palestinians to be visitors in the country. They don't feel represented by the MB." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

### ISIS is largely viewed as posing a threat to the national security and stability of Jordan.

Most respondents expressed concern that VEOs, most notably ISIS, pose a direct threat to Jordan. In particular, respondents reported that the perception that ISIS poses a threat to the security and stability of Jordan were heightened following the murder of Kasasbeh by ISIS in 2015 and government announcement of its discovery of an ISIS sleeper cell in Irbid in March 2016. Accordingly, 82 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that ISIS is a threat to the national security of Jordan, while only 14 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 1). However, some maintained that locals who joined VEOs abroad do not necessarily present a threat to Jordan, explaining that since there have been no recent successful terrorist attacks in Jordan, they do not feel that these individuals pose a threat to the security and stability of the country.<sup>73</sup>



This distinction is reinforced by sympathy for some VEO narratives that justify participation in VEOs abroad but are currently not viewed as applicable in the domestic context, such as the legitimacy of fighting the US, defending a Muslim country under attack, and defending people against a criminal regime.<sup>74</sup> Religious narratives calling for jihad also strongly resonate with many locals and many respondents agreed that jihad is an important tenet of Islam, although there is widespread disagreement in regard to where the conditions for justifiable jihad are met. This suggests that, while jihad is currently not viewed as justifiable in Jordan, it could be viewed as justifiable if the political situation changed, as it did in Syria for instance.<sup>75</sup> Notably, a small segment of the population, mostly from among the Salafist Jihadist community, supports VEOs in Syria and Iraq and already hopes that they will topple the central government and King Abdullah in Jordan. However, most respondents declared that, despite the fact that they might be critical of some government policies, they would ultimately defend Jordan in the event of an attack by VEOs or another foreign enemy, which also reinforces that some locals are apprehensive in regard to the regional security situation and believe that there is a risk that Jordan could be

<sup>73</sup> "Salafist Jihadists in Jordan have not caused problems within Jordan so people do not view them as a problem." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>74</sup> "The Salafist Jihadists have not committed violent acts in Jordan. Even those who have gone to Iraq and to Syria, they don't have a problem with that. We consider them to be fighters who are involved in a cause. Iraq was seen as a foreign intervention in a Muslim country and a US intervention. Many Jordanians were supportive of Saddam Hussein and disappointed with how Iraq turned from a developed country into what has happened now. Those who left for Syria to join JN in the beginning, this was seen as supporting the people against a criminal regime." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>75</sup> "In religion Islam encourages people to do jihad. It is about the religion itself. That means politics is not enough. If the situation in Jordan became like in Syria, then jihad in Jordan might become justifiable." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

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destabilized.<sup>76</sup> It also highlights that narratives that frame the threat emanating from VEOs as threatening national security and that call for national solidarity in that context would likely gain traction among locals, as was demonstrated by the drop in support for ISIS in the aftermath of the killing of Kasasbeh.

*"I had a friend who supported the Islamic groups in Syria. He used to pray to God that these Islamic groups will come to Jordan. He didn't join the groups, however he supported the extremism. He wanted the Islamic groups to come to Jordan so that the regime would fall, as he was opposing the Jordanian regime. He isn't religious at all. He's moderate, he fasts, but he doesn't pray. This was about a year ago."*

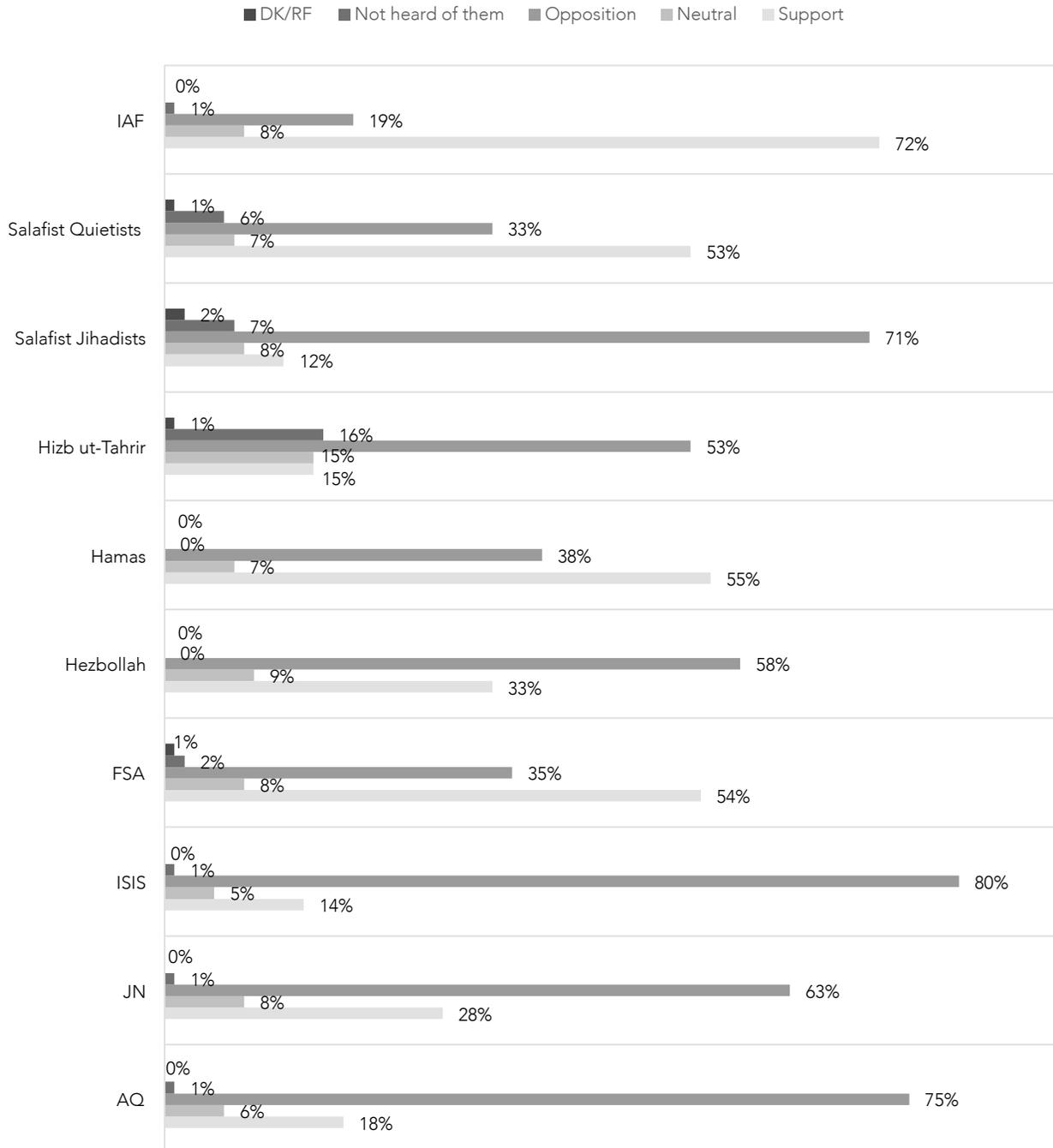
*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

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<sup>76</sup> "I live in Jordan and I clearly declare that I am against the government's policies but if ISIS were to come and fight in Jordan, I will be the first one to fight with the military here and I will support my family and my people in my country, not ISIS or JN." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

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

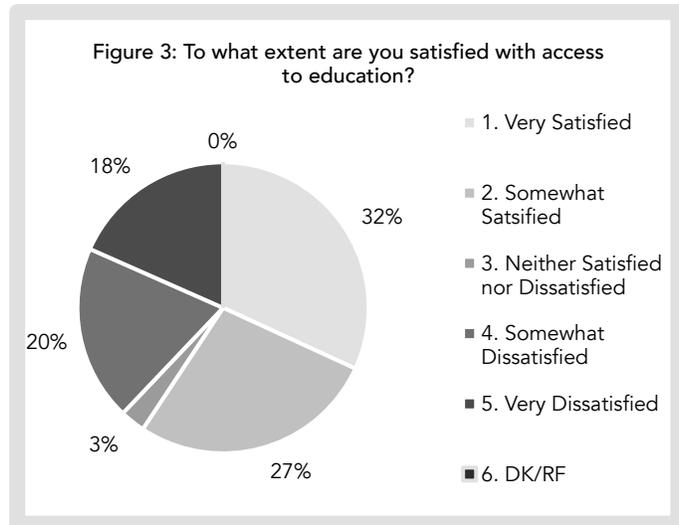


## 2.0 BASIC NEEDS DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

### 2.1 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Most locals are satisfied with access to affordable education services but call for counter radicalization efforts to be implemented in the education system.

While a majority of respondents (59 percent) indicated that they are satisfied with access to government-supplied education services, many (38 percent) reported being dissatisfied (see Figure 3). Most locals are primarily satisfied with access to education because they are free of charge and obligatory. Many also praise the general quality of education services in Jordan, which are deemed better than those in other countries in the region. Further, the relatively recent introduction of additional courses, such as English, in the curriculum has been a welcome improvement.<sup>77</sup> Some respondents also explained that university fees are widely considered to be affordable, at around 500 Jordanian dinars (JD) per year, in addition to which government universities in Jordan have quotas for tribes, which are particularly well received among locals.<sup>78</sup>



There is strong support for the view that education is key in countering radicalization in Balqa. Notably, one respondent confirmed the importance of education when he highlighted that reading and educating himself helped him to move away from radicalization and toward moderation.<sup>79</sup> There is also strong support for the view that the government needs to do more to change education curriculums at schools and universities to counter radicalization,<sup>80</sup> as extremism is also attributed to a gap in education that has reportedly resulted in limited recourse to measured dialogue and encouraged recourse to violence

<sup>77</sup> "They are happy because there are schools that are provided by the government... People are satisfied because the government provides education services free of charge and it is obligatory until the tenth grade. The fees are minimal for the schools and the school supplies and they feel that they are ahead of other countries in the region. English is now provided from the first grade and this is something new and people like this and like there is an improvement in the education system." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>78</sup> "When you go to university, there are also colleges and the fees of these are very low. Studying for two years hardly costs anything; it costs around 1,000 JD. Universities have scholarships for tribes and so they can often access higher education without paying anything. This is for people from tribes. There are two private universities in Salt but there is no government university in Salt. They can still be sent to other universities in Jordan through these scholarships." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>79</sup> "I have changed since 2006. I am happy I changed because I read. In my opinion our government should focus on reading." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>80</sup> "Education curriculums should be changed, where terrorism and extremism is addressed. Distributing worksheets with this moral code would be a possibility." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

among youths to solve disputes.<sup>81</sup> In addition support for cultural education is viewed as important, at centers such as the Ruwfaq Al Ordon Center for Arts and Culture, the Arab Islamic Cultural Association, and Musa Saket Cultural Center.<sup>82</sup> Arts and cultural activities play a subtle role in countering radicalization by involving religiously taboo activities. However, financial, religious, and cultural factors have restricted the development of the arts in Balqa. More specifically, while the King Abdullah II Fund for Development is a source of financing, cultural programs have faced obstacles obtaining funding,<sup>83</sup> and have also faced religious and cultural obstacles, specifically to making music, performing theater, screening films, and organizing mixed gender activities.<sup>84</sup>

*"If I were a leader, I would dedicate millions of JD toward arts and culture. This young religious man who came today for example, if he came in, and he met the youths, and he saw that he is different from all of them, he would want to become like them. He would see that they are happy and comfortable in a mixed environment. He would want to live like these youths. When they see that our projects are succeeding, and we have the backing of the government and the ministries, we would be able to make a difference and change his mind. Of course arts and culture would influence people."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

### **Radical religious education at mosques, schools, and universities contributed to radicalization among locals.**

Some respondents blamed the education system for radicalization among some locals, as religious teachings in schools and universities, among other institutions, is viewed as unbalanced, in need of reform,<sup>85</sup> and blamed for fueling VE in the governorate.<sup>86</sup> In particular, some objected to the rigidity of

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<sup>81</sup> "If we are talking about VEOs, we don't have that problem in my village, however if we want to speak about the youth, their lack of ability to use dialogue and tendency to resort to violence to solve their problems, of course we have that problem. We have it all over Jordan." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>82</sup> It is notable that the respondent reported that the manager of the Musa Saket Cultural Center is the head of Hayat FM, which is affiliated with the MB, which he regards as religiously extreme.

<sup>83</sup> "We face difficulties getting funding and we have limited support in Jordan. We take some money from the King Abdullah II Fund for Development and we work hard to get this money. We have been working on the center for three years. When we got a little bit of money we worked on this project in Salt." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>84</sup> "As a first project in Salt we faced lots of problems. When communities see this fact then they like it and they join us to complete this project. The culture is very traditional. We are making music and theatre and showing films and that is controversial. The society is very closed; it is not like Amman. Many people like what we are doing and some people have changed their minds." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>85</sup> "We can blame our education curriculums, our understanding of Islam for radicalization. We need Islamic scientists to redefine Islam." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>86</sup> "We see violent extremist groups today that came out of the blue because we had the basis for extremism in our societies, from the curriculums we are taught at schools and universities, to traditions of the society, and upbringing at home. They have worked for 20, 50 years and today we are seeing the result of a work that was done years ago. Today religion is used as a cover for extremism, however the reasons are much more than religion. We are only

religious education, which is also perceived as backwards and out of touch with the times.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, some highlighted that religious narratives, such as a fear of punishment by God and desire to get into heaven, that are instilled in students have had a negative impact on the community.<sup>88</sup> As a consequence, there is strong support for educational reform and support for moderate religious organizations, such as the Al Ahabash Arab Islamic Cultural Association,<sup>89</sup> and the involvement of moderate local youths,<sup>90</sup> to counter radicalization.

*"I feel that the Jordanian state isn't working hard to combat terrorism, ideologically. For example, our school curriculums were not changed or altered since 2011. The world is developing and we need to develop with it. We cannot go to Friday prayer because the preaching at mosques is out of touch with reality; the lectures are usually repetitive."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

**Focus: A religiously restrictive environment constitutes a barrier to arts and cultural activities.**

*"I did some research about the cinema that closed in Salt. I had a difficult time to reach the owners of the cinema. I felt that people didn't want to tell me, fearing that it would reopen. I felt they had a motive thinking that the cinema is haram and it would be a bad influence on the people of Salt. The owner had to close the cinema because of the pressure from MB members in the community. I felt the main reason behind closing the cinema was Islamic. It was the time when Islamists started rising and maturing as a movement and a group. In the 1970's and 1980's. The MB had a big influence on the owner. The community was accepting, however the Islamists were against it. They started with the posters, asking him not to have posters for the films with girls on them, then they asked him to stop putting up posters in general, then they told him that the cinema was a bad influence on the community because youths are leaving school to go watch films, and the cinema is creating problems for people at home between spouses. They persisted until he closed the cinema. The son of the owner said they were worried that the MB members would attack the cinema or burn it down*

seeing the result of extremism... They worked on the extremism through the home, the school, the university, the centers, and trainings." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>87</sup> "I have my comments on Islam and how it is not progressive and it is not suitable for our time. As an ambitious youth, I have my differences with Islam. We are living in a different time; we need to amend our religion so that it is suitable to our time." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>88</sup> "We were all taught that God only punishes, that we have to go to heaven by any means possible. Let's be frank. Our religious upbringing is not balanced. Our education and upbringing had an effect. Our community as well." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>89</sup> "Al Ahabash, the Arab Islamic Cultural Association, is very peaceful. They would tell you if this is haram or halal, however they wouldn't attack you or be violent against you. My best friend is one of their preachers; he has a show on Roya. He respects me and respects my projects, although they involve cultural activities, such as music and cinema. They are originally Sufi." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>90</sup> "In Salt, there are religious youths, who are progressive and against ISIS." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

*because they were very determined to close it. Some people in Salt still reject everything that is progressive or new...*

*In the past couple of years, I had a lot of art projects in Salt. Many people sent me threats. Many people sent me foul words. My uncle, every time I post anything about music, culture, or anything on Facebook, he would start saying that I should teach the Qur'an and not music. I blocked him on Facebook and I don't speak to him. Many people commented to say that we shouldn't waste their time teaching them music, we should teach the Qur'an instead. They also posted religious comments about God and Islam and how music is haram on our Facebook page. Some sent us pictures. We still didn't have anyone bothering us at the centre or any of my events. I predict that it could happen of course. I am trying to work with the people of Salt to develop this project. I do things that they like, I have a library, a painting studio, and we have cooking sessions. If we only had music and song, they would have thought we are running a nightclub."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

### **The perceived lack of access to employment opportunities makes local youths more vulnerable to recruitment into VEOs.**

Many respondents agreed that youths from economically marginalized areas who lack employment opportunities are the most vulnerable to recruitment into VEOs,<sup>91</sup> which offer them opportunities for employment and an income.<sup>92</sup> Government programs to create jobs in the governorate, such as its announcement in February 2015 that 7,095,257 JD would be invested to fund 11 projects in Balqa aiming to create 481 jobs, appear to have made little difference in public perception of access to employment.<sup>93</sup> 71 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with access to employment opportunities, while only 25 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied (see Figure 4). Most respondents also expressed frustration that their hard work does not translate into improvements in their living conditions and 66 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the people who work hardest are never rewarded the most, while 22 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 5). This indicates that there is widespread disillusionment with gaining access to opportunities to better their financial situation among locals.

Worryingly, many highlighted that a desire for financial security and frustrated attempts obtaining work domestically are factors that drive locals to join VEOs in Syria, as they are unable to improve their financial situation in Jordan,<sup>94</sup> become increasingly disgruntled at the lack of opportunities available to them,

<sup>91</sup> "In areas that are marginalized economically and politically, the youth in these areas, who do not have employment opportunities, etc. are most at risk and so Zarqa is the most at risk and Ma'an with other cities like Salt and others." (Male, 52, Academic, Amman)

<sup>92</sup> "People who need money and who are unemployed are easily recruited. The radical groups help them get money and a job." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>93</sup> Jordan Times 2015. 'Governorate Development Fund readies JD53.4m to 119 projects', Jordan Times, February 15, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> "People join for economic reasons. They go to ISIS as a last resort, as they cannot improve their situation financially." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

including increasingly hostile toward the government, and therefore view joining a VEO in Syria as an appealing alternative.<sup>95</sup> For instance, one respondent reported that recruits are provided with good salaries, free accommodation, free food, and 1,000 US dollars (USD).<sup>96</sup> Some locals also appear to have joined VEOs in Syria as part of a financial plan for the future. For instance, one respondent reported hearing a story of an unemployed man who was lured to join a VEO in Syria with the promise of being paid 600 to 700 USD over the course of six months, during which he would be able to save money, and then return to Jordan to open his own business.<sup>97</sup> It is notable that such long-term financial planning stands in stark contrast to religiously motivated individuals who appear to anticipate that they will be martyred fighting in Syria.

*"When is it that [VEOs] pose a danger to Jordan? When we have high unemployment and poverty and for a long time, whenever a new government is in place, they say that they will fight poverty and unemployment, unfortunately, I have been a PM for three years, and I used to hear this rhetoric even when I was in the armed forces, that the government has a program to fight poverty and unemployment, and they haven't combatted unemployment or poverty. Now, these youths, especially those who are already living in poverty, they are looking now for any way to get money, so if they find that there are particular groups, if they lure them with money, then you should expect that such offers would be attractive to them. This is the problem that we need to be wary of and pay close attention to, youths are a ticking bomb, this is not talk, and this is the reality.*

*We do not have a proper way to combat unemployment and poverty in the right way, in the way that provides our youths with employment. It is like no one thinks about these things at all. Unfortunately, many youths are now unemployed, they are all university graduates in the thousands, and there is an extremely high number of unemployed youths. Even the investments we speak about in Jordan, they are not investments that could provide jobs for high numbers of Jordanians and are not sufficient for our youth population. We are only thinking about lowering the country's debt and the budget deficit. I want to hear that we decreased the number of unemployed in Jordan, from 24 to 10 percent, and from 10 to 5 percent for example, to an acceptable percentage. However, what has happened is that the unemployment rate is increasing."*

*(Male, 51, MP, Balqa)*

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<sup>95</sup> "Anyone with economic difficulties could find an alternative with ISIS." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>96</sup> "Economic messages are effective communicating that they get good salaries. They give them free accommodation and food... In addition, they get 1,000 USD." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>97</sup> "I heard of a story of a guy who was unemployed and he was approached by some member of a jihadist group. He was solicited by means of getting him a better chance and that he will be smuggled through Turkey and then to Syria and then he will be paid 600 to 700 USD. They convinced him that he could only join them and be there for six months to work there, be able to save good money, then get back here and open his own business." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

Figure 4: To what extent are you satisfied with access to employment opportunities in your community?

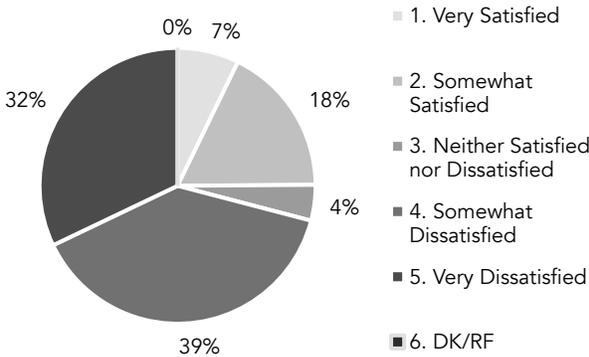
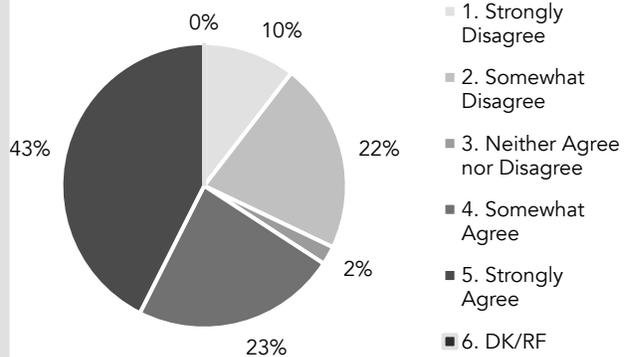


Figure 5: To what extent do you agree that the people who work hardest are never rewarded the most?



**Focus:** The lack of available opportunities for employment and support fuels a sense of resentment toward the government and society and makes local youths vulnerable to VE.

*"The ones who have money problems are most at risk of radicalization, also people who are marginalized. I want to tell you that Salafism in Salt is a big problem. They show they don't support ISIS or JN, but I believe they are involved in hidden cells and will eventually be supporters of ISIS. Those who have a poor financial situation, those who are angry at the government, and found refuge with extremism are at risk of radicalization. I believe in the saying: an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. I'll give you an example; some of the guys who worked with the armed forces had a personal problem. He faced a problem with his work, so the armed forces decided to fire him and detain him for punishment. This person then developed a negative reaction. He then met with people who have a radical ideology. Then his Facebook posts changed. He used to write posts supporting the King, and supporting the military, but then he posted stuff against the Queen and the military in a very ill-mannered way. After that he became a supporter of ISIS on his page.*

*None of his relatives stopped him. He then wrote on his Facebook page that he didn't want to leave the country because he didn't want to leave his mother. The reason why he wrote that is because it was apparent that he wanted to leave the country and join ISIS. At that time, I called Salt intelligence people and told him about this guy's situation. I wanted them to know that the guy became different, so the armed forces called him and brought him to their office, detained him, and then let him go. After that this same person was one day sitting with three other guys in his town, and they told him that they wanted to carry out a terrorist attack against a member of the intelligence department in Salt, so now he will be prosecuted in the State Security Court. I think that when we see such a person with no chance of getting a job in his country, we should take him under our wing, that way things would have been different.*

*This story happened two to three months ago. After he was fired, he took another turn. I believe if*

*he had been given a chance to work, things would have been different. He is not my friend but we were close. This guy was active in his community and among his family members, but his initiatives were simple. It is not that his family supported him in what he did or how he did things. I believe if someone took him under his wing and helped him in that, things would have been different for him. I am not saying that the government is to blame for what happened to him. Many different factors played a role in what happened to him. The armed forces found a gun in his house; they found that he was planning a terrorist attack, as they also found several communication lines he was using, suggesting he was planning an attack."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

### **The support offered by Salafist Jihadist leaders and VEO members to local youths in obtaining work and an income also makes the latter more vulnerable and receptive to VEO narratives.**

Some respondents reported that Salafist Jihadist leaders provide youths with much needed employment opportunities in marginalized parts of Balqa. While individuals might also have religious motivations, some respondents highlighted the importance of opportunities for employment in male youths adopting a Salafist Jihadist ideology.<sup>98</sup> For instance, Salafist Jihadist leaders employ youths to work for them in Baqa'a refugee camp. As a consequence, youths are more easily influenced when they work in close proximity with, and are provided with financial and other forms of support by, Salafist Jihadist leaders.<sup>99</sup> More specifically, Salafist Jihadist leaders who are affiliated with ISIS have supported unemployed youths by providing them with employment opportunities in shops and other small businesses.<sup>100</sup> For instance, one respondent reported that a Salafist Jihadist invited his recently fired acquaintance to live with him and supported him in finding work, soon after which the acquaintance began posting messages on Facebook in support of ISIS. This highlights that VEO members pray on those who lack opportunities and provide them with much needed support, but also that locals are in a position to alert the authorities.<sup>101</sup>

*"I fixed my heater at a shop owned by an ISIS member. When I went to the shop, I found three or four young men working with him. He gives them salaries or pocket money, he took them off the*

<sup>98</sup> "Some of them left because of money, also for economic reasons. So if a person joins, he gets money and he also he has to adopt the Salafist ideology, but mainly he would go for money." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>99</sup> "The groups provide alternative income opportunities for youth. They give them salaries or hire the youth to work for them in their businesses. It is not because people are financially underprivileged that they join. It is not only the humiliation. It's the alternative that no one else is providing." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>100</sup> "ISIS is trying to establish a social incubator for its members. They give them money and provide them with job opportunities. They are attracting young people, playing on their frustration and lack of opportunities. They are socially working on influencing the youth, giving them a place to be, socially and while making money. They could hire them in shops." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>101</sup> "When he used to write posts supporting ISIS, one guy invited him to live with him, and that guy was a Salafist and had a radical ideology. So when you know someone like that and you see a Salafist take care of him and give him a place to stay and a job, you realize how ISIS work to brainwash weak people or those who have no chance in life." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

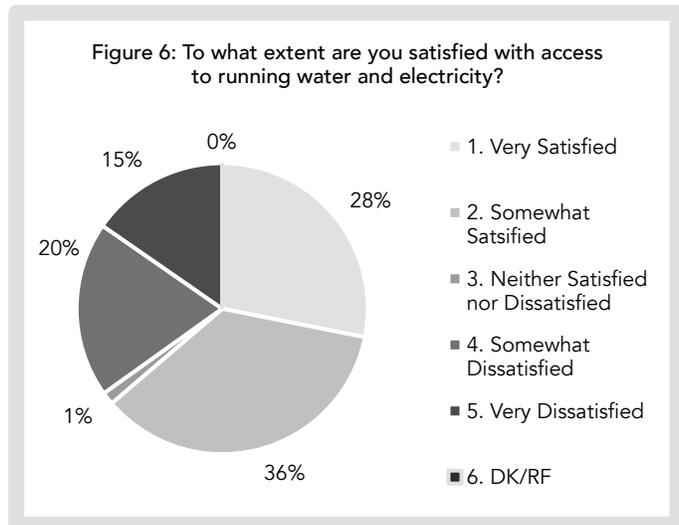
*streets and now they can afford to buy their cigarettes.”*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

## 2.2 UTILITIES AND SERVICES

### Most locals are satisfied with access to government services, notably water and electricity.

Most respondents reported being satisfied with access to government services, for instance to running water and electricity services. Specifically, 64 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported being ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ satisfied with access to running water and electricity, while 35 percent reported being ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ dissatisfied (see Figure 6). Most consider both the supply of running water and electricity to be reliable and favorably compare the situation in Balqa with that in Amman. Some respondents speculated that the government specifically ensures that services in some areas of Balqa, such as Salt, Ira, Yarqa, Allan, Al Arda, and Shuneh, are reliable to cater to prominent tribes in those areas, such as the Abadi, Hiyari, Awamleh, and Hamoud, since the government wants to guarantee the loyalty of such tribes in Balqa by providing them with reliable services. In addition, tribes from Balqa are usually well represented in the government and are thereby better able to advocate for reliable and improved government services. Most notably, Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour is from Salt.<sup>102</sup> Notably, some marginalized areas in Balqa, such as Baqa’a refugee camp, which has a West Bank Jordanian and non-tribal population, are less well served by government services, as a consequence of which both resentment toward the government and propensity toward VE are also greater there. Balqa has received development support internationally aimed at improving access to water. For instance, in November 2014, Japan pledged to invest in rehabilitating and expanding water networks in Balqa.<sup>103</sup>



*“The thing is that in most governorates, other than Amman, the water supply is very regular. People don’t wait for several weeks to access water. Most of those who live in Balqa, specifically in Salt, Ira, Yarqa, Allan, Al Arda, and Shuneh, there are Jordanian tribes. We are not talking about Baqa’a*

<sup>102</sup> “Historically in Salt the tribes were against the Hashemite rule in Jordan. Somehow the government is trying to contain their anger by providing them with services and thereby buying their loyalty. The current prime minister is also from Salt and that helps represent them in the government. They are always well represented in parliament as well.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

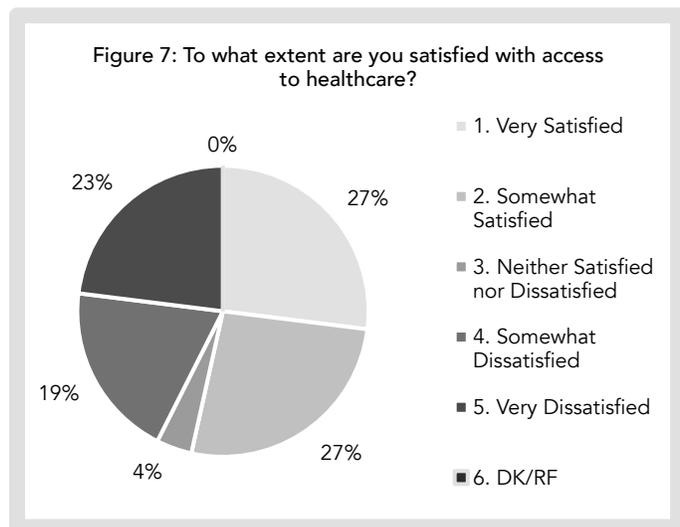
<sup>103</sup> Kameda, Masaaki 2014. ‘Abe vows ¥2 billion in aid for waterworks in Jordan’, Japan Times, November 21, 2014.

*refugee camp and so services are always provided for them. The Jordanian government decided that water and electricity should be provided everywhere and so even rural areas have those services. The main streets might not have electricity but in the villages they have electricity.”*

*(Female, 32, Activist, Amman)*

Although most locals are satisfied with access to healthcare services, there are growing concerns that Syrian refugees are putting pressure on services.

There are three government hospitals in Balqa, in addition to which each district has a healthcare center. Respondents indicated that healthcare fees are affordable and that they are also satisfied with access to medical specialists.<sup>104</sup> Many locals also work for the army or the police and therefore have access to the King Hussein Medical Center in Amman free of charge, as do their family members.<sup>105</sup> As a result, satisfaction with access to government-supplied healthcare services in Balqa is high and 54 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported being ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ satisfied with access to healthcare, while 42 percent reported being ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ dissatisfied (see Figure 7). Despite widespread satisfaction with access to government-supplied healthcare services in Balqa, there is growing concern that the influx of Syrian refugees has put excessive pressure on healthcare services, with some reporting that waiting times have increased by several hours in the past few years.<sup>106</sup> The perception that government services for Jordanians are suffering as a result of support offered to Syrian refugees might further contribute to growing resentment toward Syrian refugees and could therefore increase propensity toward VE, especially in already marginalized areas.



<sup>104</sup> “There are three government hospitals in Balqa and each district has a health center... Those who do not work for the government, army, or police, have access to government hospitals and pay a minimum charge if they are Jordanian. All of those health centers exist in each district in Balqa, you can find almost all of the relevant specialists, for eyes, for women, for children, they have all of the specialists.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>105</sup> “In Balqa, since most of areas like Salt, Ira and Yarqa, Allan, Al Arda, and Shuneh, people work with the army and the police department, these have one of the best hospitals in the MENA region called King Hussein Medical Hospital. This is for military and police employees and their family members. This is located near Fahais and Mahes.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>106</sup> “[Jordanians] feel that refugees took their space, and for example in health clinics, Jordanians now have to wait in line for three hours because of the influx of refugees, but previously it took them only 30 minutes.” (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

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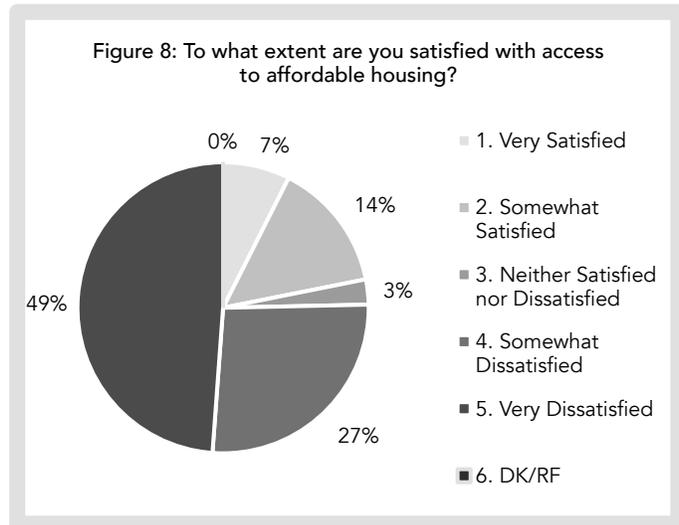
*"[Jordanians] feel that refugees took their space, and for example in health clinics, Jordanians now have to wait in line for three hours because of the influx of refugees, while previously it took them only 30 minutes to be seen by a doctor."*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

### 2.3 HOUSING AND DEBT

Most locals are concerned over access to affordable housing and there are growing concerns that Syrian refugees are responsible for pushing up prices.

The influx of Syrian refugees has raised concerns over access to affordable housing and is blamed for pushing up housing costs across Balqa. Respondents explained that Syrian refugees move into flats with large families and are therefore able to afford higher rents, of around 300 JD per month for instance, while such rents are unaffordable for a Jordanian one-person household. As a result, most respondents indicated being dissatisfied with access to affordable housing. Specifically, 76 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied with access to affordable housing, while 21 percent reported being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied



(see Figure 8). In addition, locals are increasingly concerned about rising prices, such as fuel prices, and in part also blame the higher cost of living on the large number of Syrian refugees in Jordan.<sup>107</sup>

*"Rents went up. Jordanians used to rent places cheaper but now property owners rent houses to Syrian refugees because a refugee would come with his family and his extended family, they would all live in one house and they don't mind that because they need to live and they would pay 300 JD for rent. Each family would live in one room. But I can't live with my brother and my own family here as a Jordanian in one place, so now the normal citizen can't pay rents here anymore."*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

Locals deem financial concerns, mainly resulting from the high and rising cost of living, to be a key concern and driver of recruitment into VEOs.

Economically marginalized areas of Balqa are widely perceived as being the most vulnerable to VE and economic concerns remain at the forefront of complaints against the government. In particular, high and rising prices, such as housing costs (see above), stagnant wages, and high household debt are serious concerns for locals.<sup>108</sup> Many respondents complained about widespread debt and their high reliance on

<sup>107</sup> "The negative effect already happened here. You can see its effect politically, economically, culturally, all of these issues. Recently you can see how the prices of oil changed; living costs went up in Jordan. Jordan faced a very hard and delicate situation, adding to it the refugee issue in Jordan." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>108</sup> "Economic reasons, unemployment, and job opportunities play a role, and inflation, which had a great influence. Before people were paid 300 JD and they could live, today 300 JD doesn't do anything for anyone. These people's jobs didn't develop with time." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

taking out bank loans to cover their daily needs,<sup>109</sup> and the vast majority (89 percent) confirmed that they perceive debt as a serious problem in their communities, while only nine percent disagreed (see Figure 9). In addition, the perceived unequal distribution of government investment and donor aid is a grievance, as locals believe that investment is largely focused on Amman, to the detriment of other parts of the country, specifically Balqa.<sup>110</sup> Worryingly, many respondents (44 percent) agreed with the statement that jihad is an easy way to make money, although most (50 percent) disagreed (see Figure 10), which indicates that locals, in particular in economically marginalized areas, might be vulnerable to VEO narratives that involve financial incentives.

*“Most locals complain about high debts and say that most of the time they take bank loans.”*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

Figure 9: To what extent do you agree that debt is a problem in your community?

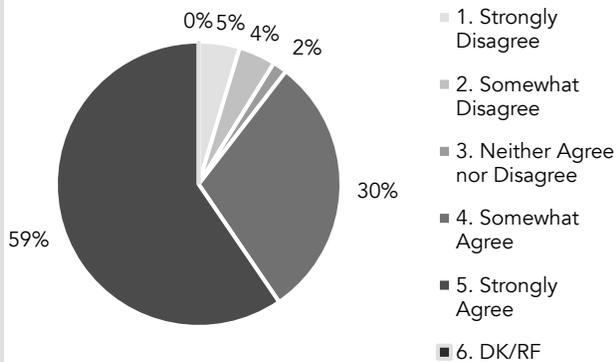
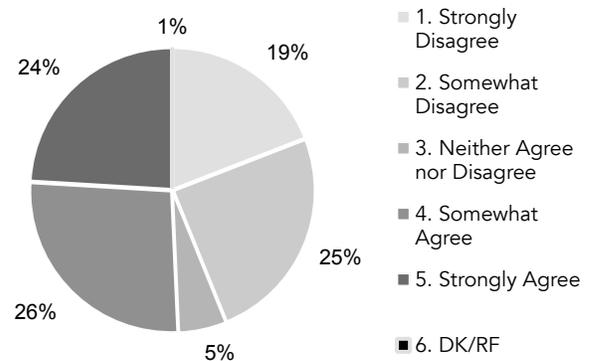


Figure 10: To what extent do you agree that violent jihad is an easy way to earn money?



<sup>109</sup> “Most locals complain about high debts and say that most of the time they take bank loans.” (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

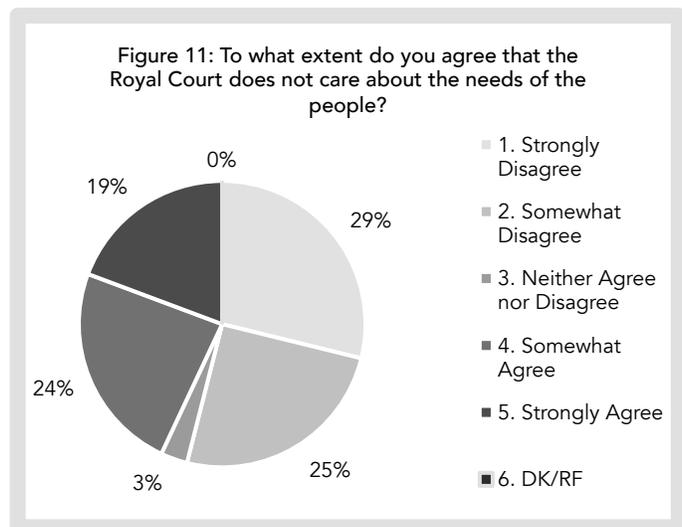
<sup>110</sup> “Donor aid has been focused in Amman and other areas have been marginalized. This discrepancy has fostered radicalization. All messages against extremism are focused in Amman, the work of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] I mean.” (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

### 3.0 GOVERNANCE DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

#### 3.1 CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Approval of the Royal Court stems from the popularity of its financial support programs, anti-corruption efforts, and counter radicalization initiatives, although many worry that it is not serving its people well.

Much of the support for the Royal Court, which is the official body that supports the domestic and international activities of King Abdullah,<sup>111</sup> stems from the financial support that it offers to locals, for instance financial support to cover healthcare costs at government hospitals and permission to access military hospitals.<sup>112</sup> While corruption among government officials is a serious concern, some respondents indicated that the Royal Court is exempt from such corrupt activities, suggesting that some have more trust in the Royal Court than the central government.<sup>113</sup> For instance, while locals might be concerned about corruption in the government, complaints are mostly leveled at particular government officials, rather than the King and/or the Royal Court. In fact, some expressed the belief that the King is eager to tackle corruption in the country.<sup>114</sup> Finally, there is also support for the counter radicalization efforts of King Abdullah, specifically in promoting moderate Islam internationally, although one respondent lamented that, in her experience, young students lack awareness of the international role of the King. Accordingly, most respondents (55 percent) are confident that the Royal Court caters to the needs of its people, while fewer (43 percent) disagreed (see Figure 11). However, respondents mainly expressed their discontent on governance in reference to the central government rather than the Royal Court (see below), notably also out of concern that they might incriminate themselves.



<sup>111</sup> RHC 2015. 'The Royal Hashemite Court', RHC, 2015. Available at: <www.rhc.jo>

<sup>112</sup> "The Royal Court gives the permission to people to have access to the military hospital. They also pay for healthcare services at government hospitals, which would otherwise require a minimal charge if you are not a government employee. Sometimes they also pay for people from other countries in the region, for Syrians for example, or for Palestinians." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>113</sup> "Corruption of the government is worth mentioning of course, however the Royal Court is very moderate." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

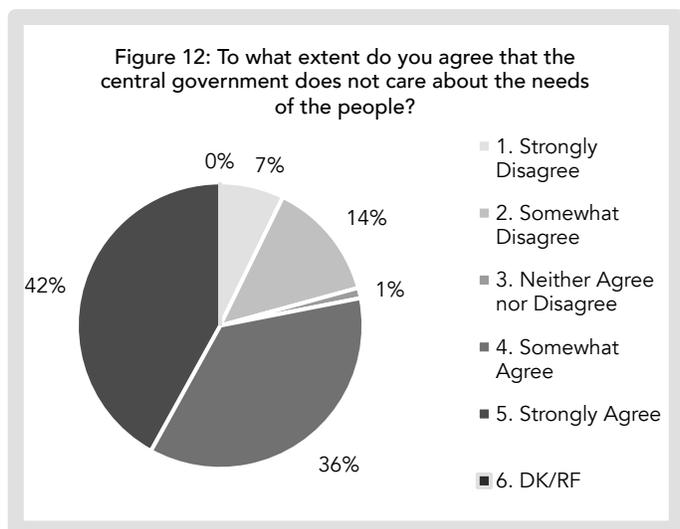
<sup>114</sup> "Many people have a very positive opinion of the King and of the Royal Court in Balqa. They might have issues with certain government officials but not the King. When they complain about corruption, then it is corrupt government officials who are blamed and not the King. The King is seen as eager to tackle corruption in the country." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

*"Many people have a very positive opinion of the King and of the Royal Court in Balqa. They might have issues with certain government officials but not the King. When they complain about corruption, then it is corrupt government officials who are blamed and not the King. The King is seen as eager to tackle corruption in the country."*

*(Female, 32, Activist, Amman)*

### Growing frustration with persisting economic concerns, such as high and rising prices and household debt, is increasing resentment toward the central government.

Some respondents continued to blame the government for contributing to radicalization by failing to implement political and social reforms. They gave the example of the political parties law, which some continue to view as restricting political participation,<sup>115</sup> despite amendments in 2015, and call for greater political and press freedoms,<sup>116</sup> most notably through reform of the electoral system, changes to which were also implemented in August 2015.<sup>117</sup> For instance, some believe that the dissolution of the HIRAK movement that emerged around 2011, the arrest of activists involved, and persisting frustration at the failure of the government to implement democratic reforms, contributed to a sense of political marginalization that drives propensity toward VE.<sup>118</sup> However, above all else, locals are increasingly frustrated with the government as a result of persisting economic concerns, such as high and rising prices and household debt. Accordingly, 78 percent of Balqa GQ



<sup>115</sup> "The party law is not going to serve the best interest of the Jordanian citizen. What actually serves him is to produce a way where the person can vote for the person who has high qualifications and the ability to talk and defend his country, really represent him in the Parliament." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>116</sup> "If you deal with the main issues and fix them, extremism becomes a secondary problem. Extremism is a loud expression of the problems we have today, like unemployment, poverty, lack of freedoms, lack of possibilities of political involvement, the failure of reform efforts." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>117</sup> Raed Omari 2015. 'New elections bill sheds one-vote system', Jordan Times, August 31, 2015.

<sup>118</sup> "In Jordan we have a huge economic problem we have numerous groups that fall under the poverty line and so this has really created a big problem with the aggravated economic situation, all of these issues created big problems, even in Amman and Salt, so some youths began to go. The failure of democratic reforms, the failure of the movements which emerged in 2011 and were broken up and the activists which were arrested, all of this lead to many people being frustrated not only due to economic marginalization but also due to political marginalization so there are those areas which suffer from economic marginalization and those that also suffer from political marginalization such as Amman or Salt." (Male, 52, Academic, Amman)

respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the central government does not care about the needs of the people, while 21 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 12).

While most respondents reported declining confidence in the central government, some also highlighted that many locals have strong ties with the government because they are employed in the army, police, or public sector, and that as a result ties to the government are stronger and, for example, fewer locals participated in the Hirak movement during the Arab Spring than in other parts of the country.<sup>119</sup> Notably, students protested high food prices and unemployment and demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Samir Rifai in 2011;<sup>120</sup> protesters also clashed with police and demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour following his announcement of higher fuel prices in 2012.<sup>121</sup>

*"In Jordan we have a huge economic problem we have numerous groups that fall under the poverty line and so this has really created a big problem with the aggravated economic situation, all of these issues created big problems, even in Amman and Salt, so some youths began to go. The failure of democratic reforms, the failure of the movements which emerged in 2011 and were broken up and the activists which were arrested, all of this lead to many people being frustrated not only due to economic marginalization but also due to political marginalization so there are those areas which suffer from economic marginalization and those that also suffer from political marginalization such as Amman or Salt."*

*(Male, 52, Academic, Amman)*

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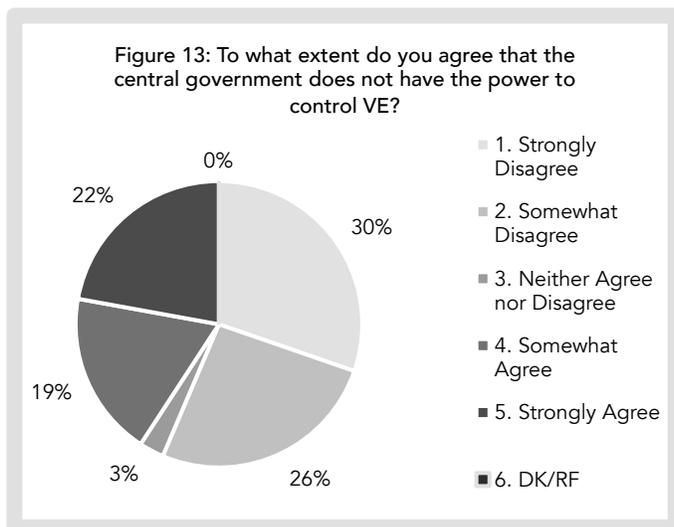
<sup>119</sup> "Salt didn't take part in protests during the Arab Spring and during the Hirak movement. People who are in Amman are educated and have a political background and certain ideology. In Ma'an and Karak they are in the south and they have poverty pockets and are economically marginalized. They have historical conflicts with the government because of the oppression that they have been facing. They feel that there is no plan to develop the economic situation. In Balqa there was nothing. There seems to be a greater level of satisfaction with the government. They are East Jordanian and the government, the army, and the police employ a lot of the population." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>120</sup> Johnny McDevitt 2011. 'Jordanians protest against soaring food prices', Guardian, 15 January 2011.

<sup>121</sup> Al Jazeera 2012. 'Protests in Jordan after spike in fuel prices', Al Jazeera, November 14, 2012.

**Confidence in the ability of the central government to control VE is strong but many locals worry that it cannot regulate the flow of Jordanians into Syria.**

While most respondents (56 percent) indicated support in the ability of the central government to control VE, many (41 percent) expressed concern (see Figure 13). In particular, some respondents expressed confidence that strict security measures have created a climate of fear and greater alertness among members of the public that has contributed to the resilience of the country to VE,<sup>122</sup> for instance as a result of heightened community support in identifying individuals vulnerable to recruitment into VEOs. For example, one respondent reported a local to the government who he suspected was planning to travel to join a VEO in Syria via Saudi Arabia and Turkey.<sup>123</sup> While Jordan was previously considered as a gateway for fighters to Syria, the situation changed in early 2015, when border controls were tightened and a greater number of Jordanians were stopped from crossing the border into Syria.<sup>124</sup>



Additionally, travel bans were imposed on radicalized individuals, some of whom published messages in support of ISIS on social media for instance.<sup>125</sup> This led some to conclude that loose border controls were in itself a counter radicalization strategy of the government, as it intended to rid the country of extremists

<sup>122</sup> "I don't think these groups could succeed in creating as much chaos in Jordan. They won't be able to fight the state of Jordan because it is more of a solid and strong environment security wise. Under such strict security measures, and the fear mongering the state promoted, the conditions are not as fertile." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>123</sup> "The Jordanian government stopped many people from traveling when they suspected that a person wants to join the radical groups in Syria. I told them of a person I knew about and they stopped him from traveling. He said he wanted to go to Saudi Arabia for Umrah and I knew he wanted to go to Turkey through Saudi Arabia to fight in Syria. So I asked the government to stop him and they did. I knew he wanted to go there because he doesn't look like a person who would go to pray in Saudi Arabia. I talked to the intelligence about this person who wants to travel and they got the message. This is one of the main reasons why a person would not go to fight. This person won't get hurt if his name was revealed." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>124</sup> "Jordan was a gateway through the borders. A little before Moath Kasasbeh was killed they stopped it. Jordanian borders have very high security measures now. It's almost impossible to smuggle people through." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>125</sup> "The travel ban that was imposed by the government, asking some people to be checked at police stations before leaving the country, some people who got arrested in the GID [Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate] were released on the condition that they not leave the country. These people were actually supporting ISIS on social media, one of them tried to publish a justification of Kasasbeh being burned alive by ISIS. They were publishing some extreme ideas in support of ISIS." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

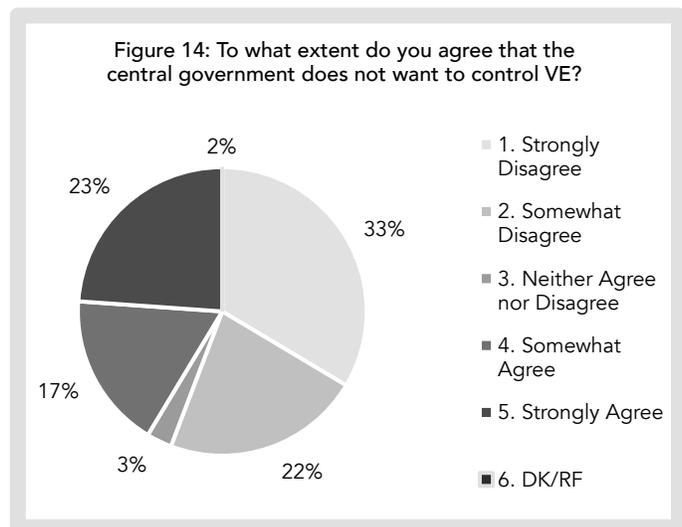
by facilitating their entry into Syria.<sup>126</sup> However, several respondents reported that locals now travel to Syria via Turkey instead,<sup>127</sup> and some remain concerned that the government cannot control the flow of Jordanians into Syria. In contrast, there appears to be greater agreement that the government has been effective in controlling the flow of returning fighters into Jordan.<sup>128</sup>

*"If for example you take what happened yesterday, [the discovery of the ISIS sleeper cell in Irbid], and how many people were following what was happening on social media, and praising our security forces and saying how proud they are, this tells you something."*

*(Male, 51, MP, Balqa)*

**Confidence in the ability of the JAF to protect Jordan is strong, in particular as a result of strengthened border controls.**

Most locals express confidence and trust in the JAF, with some singling out the JAF as the only non-corrupt entity in Jordan, despite rumored favoritism in the hiring process, and others commending the JAF for its respectful behavior toward members of the public.<sup>129</sup> Most respondents (68 percent) expressed confidence in the ability of the JAF to protect the borders and thereby keep Jordanians safe, while a minority (29 percent) expressed concern (see Figure 15). While some respondents pointed out that engagement with the JAF is limited, most respondents (69 percent) indicated that the JAF are professional and respectful, while a minority (28 percent) indicated they are not (see



<sup>126</sup> "The government hasn't done anything to counter radicalization in my area. They didn't fight or combat extremism. I believe that the state facilitated them joining the fight in Syria. They opened the borders for them to go. They wanted to get rid of them, so they sent them to fight in Syria. No one returned." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>127</sup> "I have heard that [those who fight in Syria] are recruited through mosques, social media networks, and that some left from Salt to Syria, the borders were facilitated. Those people are leaving from Salt in general. They say that the borders are open. Some go to Turkey." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>128</sup> "Jordan cannot stop people from leaving to join jihad in Syria, however they don't let them back in, if they decide to return. I have heard about people who returned, some say this person or that was in Syria. I am pretty sure that the government in Jordan would let people go to join jihad, however they don't let them back into the country, should they decide to return, especially from Syria and Iraq." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>129</sup> "Locals say that the army is the only non-corrupted entity in Jordan and they are the only one they still trust in the state and although they sometimes using wasta in hiring process their members are well respected and there is a strong consensus that they deal with people in a respectful way." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

Figure 16). In particular, there is confidence that the JAF have been effective in tightening border control from around 2015 at the latest by stepping up their presence and activities and have therefore stopped the flow of Jordanians into Syria across the Jordanian-Syrian border. In fact, in 2015 Jordan benefited from US support in stepping up border controls by the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency with support in capabilities including among others: radars, electro/optical infrared cameras, communications, and command and control software, and upgrades to the Border Security Operations Center.<sup>130</sup> In addition, the strong support for the JAF might stem from close ties with locals, as many have family members who are, or are themselves, employed by the JAF.

While there is strong confidence in both the ability and desire of the government to control VE, many remain concerned that the government lacks the desire to control VE. Specifically, 40 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the central government does not want to control VE, although a majority of 55 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 14). In particular, some respondents expressed concerns that the central government is not doing enough to target Salafist Jihadist groups in Jordan, even though it knows the names of members and locations of such groups, as it does not interfere with them so long as they do not pose a direct threat to national security, and worry that this strategy might be short sighted and destabilize the country in the longer term.<sup>131</sup> In particular, the government announcement of its discovery of an ISIS cell in Irbid in March 2016 heightened concerns among locals.<sup>132</sup> The perception that the government was lax in enforcing border controls in the early years of the Syrian conflict has also contributed to concerns over the government's desire to control VE, especially among the parents of locals who joined VEOs in Syria.<sup>133</sup> Notably, some respondents also highlighted the role that society has to play in countering radicalization in Balqa and highlighted that it should not only be the responsibility of the government to control VE.<sup>134</sup>

*"For sure they are doing a good job strategically, when the security services in Jordan hear of anyone believing in Wahhabism, but unfortunately their vision is short. When they know of anyone who wants to go to Syria, they don't mind but they make sure that they do not do anything here in Jordan. It's forbidden. It's a red line. There is a security program here and I believe everyone is followed. What's happening in the region is huge but at least they are not allowed to touch the*

<sup>130</sup> Jaber Ali 2015. 'Jordan Enhances Border Control Surveillance with Syria and Iraq', Middle East Confidential, July 09, 2015.

<sup>131</sup> "I'm not a security guard but I believe that security bodies know exactly about those cells that believe in Wahhabism by name and where their locations are exactly... But unfortunately nothing is done." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

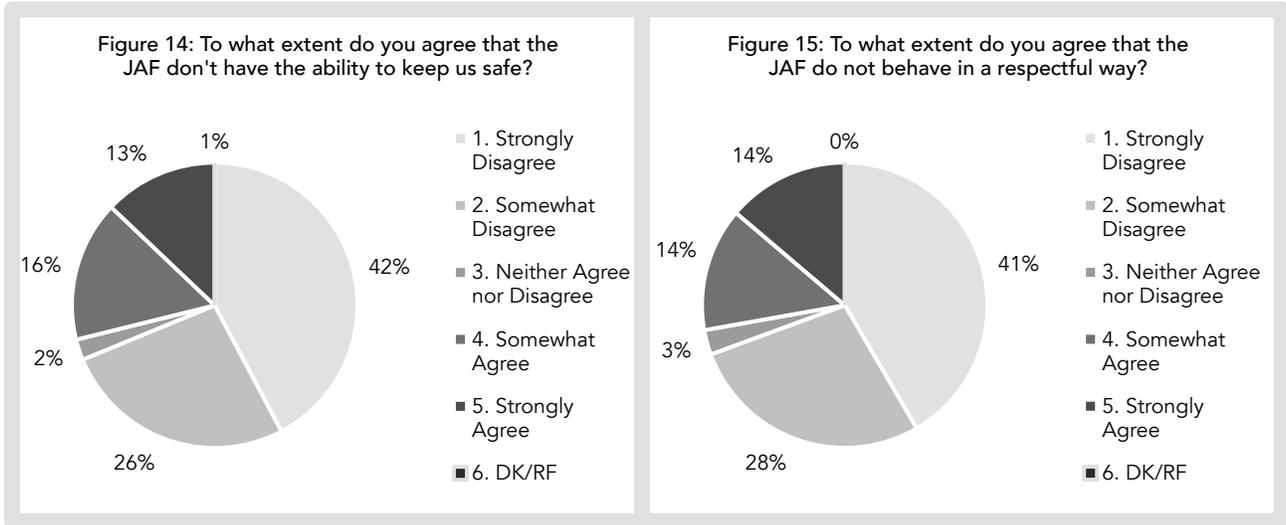
<sup>132</sup> "I believe that the state knows everything. They have intelligence officers everywhere and they collect all this information and use this or act only when people get out of control. I feel this is stupid on the government's part. Like in Irbid, the state knew about the 20 people there two weeks prior to the attack. They let them roam free until they acted and carried out their operation." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>133</sup> "I have a question. Who made it easy for them to go? Were there supervision at the borders to see if people are going? Also those parents ask the same question. How did the government accept that Jordanians would be smuggled through borders and go to Syria and Iraq? We all know the situation there." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>134</sup> "I don't believe that the government is solely responsible for fighting terrorism. It has to come from society as well." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

*Jordanian government.”*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*



**Some locals are concerned that the government lacks a clear strategy to counter VE in Jordan.**

Many respondents expressed concerns that the central government lacks a clear and consistent strategy in countering VE, with many pointing to previously lax border controls on the Jordanian-Syrian border as contradictory to government announcements that it is fighting VE, and alleging that it has been indirectly facilitating the flow of fighters from Jordan into Syria, especially in the early years of the Syrian conflict. Further, several respondents reported that the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which is responsible for appointing imams and monitoring religious institutions, is indirectly encouraging radicalization, for instance by allowing radical imams, including Salafists, to preach, while in some instances putting pressure on Sufi and other more moderate imams. Such perceived encouragement for radical religious leaders by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is interpreted as contradicting government policies that proclaim to counter VE, such as tightened border controls, domestic security measures, and intervention in Syria against ISIS. Some speculated that the contradiction in the government approach to countering radicalization might result from its desire to cater to the demands of both Gulf countries, that fund radical religious groups within Jordan, on the one hand, and Europe and the US, that demand religious moderation from Jordan, on the other hand.<sup>135</sup> As a consequence, many demand that the government

<sup>135</sup> “My uncle is an imam. The Ministry of Religious Affairs claims to be fighting terrorism but in reality they are supporting extremist ideas. They support imams who are extremist. They interfere with the work of moderate imams. Some mosques get an order that they want a Salafist imam rather than a Sufi imam for instance. They also hassle Sufi imams. The policy of the government is unclear and it is wrong. One the one hand, there is the agenda of the Gulf countries and on the other hand there is Europe and the US, to whom they want to show that they are moderate Muslims. The Jordanian state is only concerned about money. There is a lot of pressure in Jordan because Jordan depends on money from other countries.” (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

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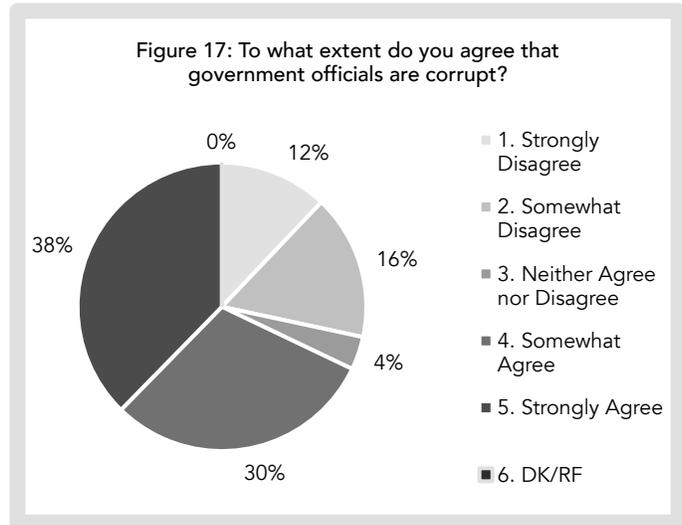
adopt a coherent strategy to counter VE in Jordan and, in particular, make more of an effort to crack down on inflammatory rhetoric and hate speech.

*"If you were a father of a family, if I found out that one of your sons smokes pot, can you stop this son? Of course you can. The government is both supporting and fighting extremism... It is like a drama. The government wants to give Salafist Jihadists and opposition politicians a platform to express themselves and to show the world that there is freedom of speech in Jordan. However, on the ground, they oppress them. The government is right not to allow them to express themselves. They have a bad influence on the youth. It is good that the government is oppressing them. However, it is not doing a good job keeping them quiet. They attack people for being terrorists on one street but on the other they allow them to leave to fight in Syria. The position of the government is unclear."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

**Perceived widespread corruption among government officials remains a serious concern and continues to drive resentment toward the government and weaken national solidarity.**

Most locals are seriously concerned about corruption among government officials, in particular as a result of the perception that increasingly high taxes do not translate into improvements in the delivery of government services.<sup>136</sup> As a result, 68 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that government officials are corrupt, while 28 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 17). Many locals are also suspicious of privatization deals, such as in the potash, phosphate, cement, water, transportation, and banking industries, among others, speculating that the government has sold its assets for the benefit of a few high level government officials.



Crucially, several respondents linked corruption in government institutions to support for VEOs, explaining that VEO narratives have greater resonance among disgruntled locals who feel betrayed by their government, which suggests that, if left unaddressed, grievances related to perceived high corruption could increase propensity toward VE and threaten stability.<sup>137</sup>

*“When privatization started in Jordan this made things worse rather than better, people feel all the privatization deals are corrupt and they question all of them, they feel like the government sold all of the country’s assets and this includes potash, cement, phosphate, water, also hotels and a lot of government shares in the Housing Bank, Cairo Amman Bank, the Bank of Export Financing, and the Industrial Development Bank, and the tomato paste factory in Jordan Valley, and the Jordan dairy factory, Petra company for transportation, which has also been conducting leasing operations for the Aqaba Railway Corporation for 25 years and public transport and the Jordanian water authority. They feel like there is corruption everywhere and on higher levels.”*

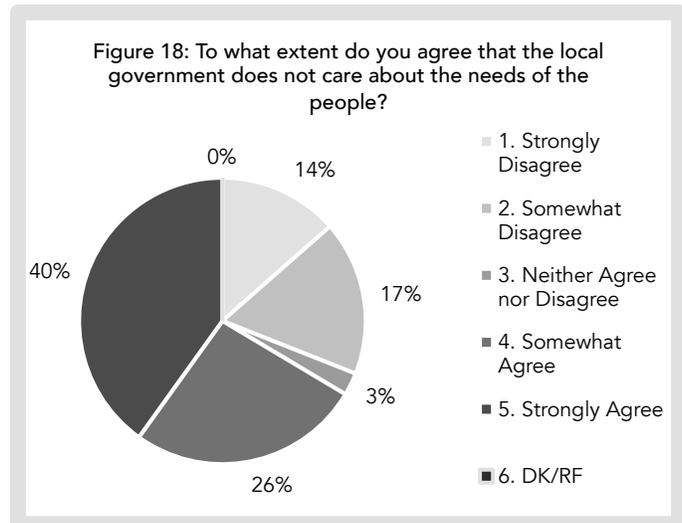
*(Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)*

<sup>136</sup> “People start to feel that the officials are corrupt since the prices keep getting higher and the salaries are almost the same and they believe this is a part of corruption since the government just increases taxes as the solution for any problem.” (Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)

<sup>137</sup> “People agree with VEOs as a result of corruption. People don’t feel that they are citizens of this country, the corruption in institutions is a grievance for them.” (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

**Confidence in the local government is strong but many are concerned with corruption and nepotism in local government elections and service delivery.**

The majority (66 percent) of respondents expressed confidence in local government representatives and their municipalities and disagreed that the local government does not care about the needs of the people, while a minority (31 percent) agreed (see Figure 18). In particular, confidence in the local government stems from both tribal connections with local government officials and legitimacy achieved through elections, which is absent from government appointed positions,<sup>138</sup> although some locals are concerned that municipality elections are corrupt and nepotistic, in particular as a result of tribal influence.<sup>139</sup>



Additionally, local government officials are viewed as advocating for improved living conditions on behalf of locals. For instance, in January 2016, Member of Parliament (MP) Mahmoud Kharabsheh from Balqa complained that the fall in international oil prices was not reflected in the fuel prices set by the government and also called for the implementation of projects in Salt to improve the quality of government services.<sup>140</sup> Criticism of local governance largely stems from the perception that municipalities serve some parts of Balqa better than others. For instance, some areas of the governorate are excluded from the sewage system and some areas are also poorly served by road maintenance services. More specifically, areas where locals complain that they are poorly served by government services reportedly include: Ira and Yarqa, Um Jouzeh, Zai, Wadi Al Hour, Al Yazeidiah, Rmamain, Allan, Dahiyat Um Al Zohour, Berkat Al Amiriah, and Naqb Al Dabour.<sup>141</sup> In particular, garbage collection is a strong grievance against municipalities, especially in the summer, when slow garbage collection is an especially large nuisance.

*"The municipality role is to provide services for the people but some areas are not included in the sanitation system and in some areas they don't maintain the roads. People demand annual road maintenance since a lot of the roads are damaged after each winter. People also keep complaining*

<sup>138</sup> "In Amman people are not aware of the role of the municipality but in other cities you will find that they are aware about it because it touches them directly and when they take part in the election process and they elect a particular person it is because they are from a certain tribe so people know they can ask him to do better work when it comes to the municipality." (Female, 33, Activist, Amman)

<sup>139</sup> "Some people believe that the municipality elections are corrupt." (Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)

<sup>140</sup> Omari, Raed 2016. 'MPs urge gov't to raise salaries, address poverty, unemployment', Jordan Times, January 12, 2016.

<sup>141</sup> "There are areas in Balqa that do not have sewage systems, such as for instance: Ira and Yarqa, Um Jouzeh, Zai, Wadi Al Hour, Al Yazeidiah, Rmamain, Allan, Dahiyat Um Al Zohour, Berkat Al Amiriah, and Naqb Al Dabour." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

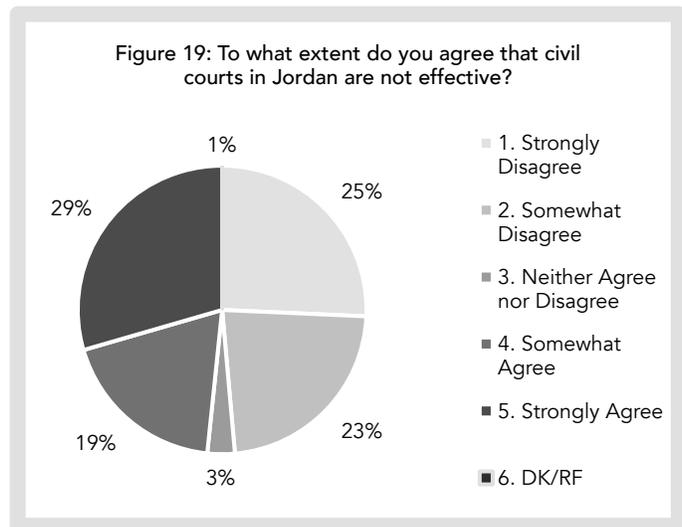
*about garbage collection since it might stay for days and especially in the summer is not collected regularly enough."*

*(Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)*

### 3.2 LAW ENFORCEMENT

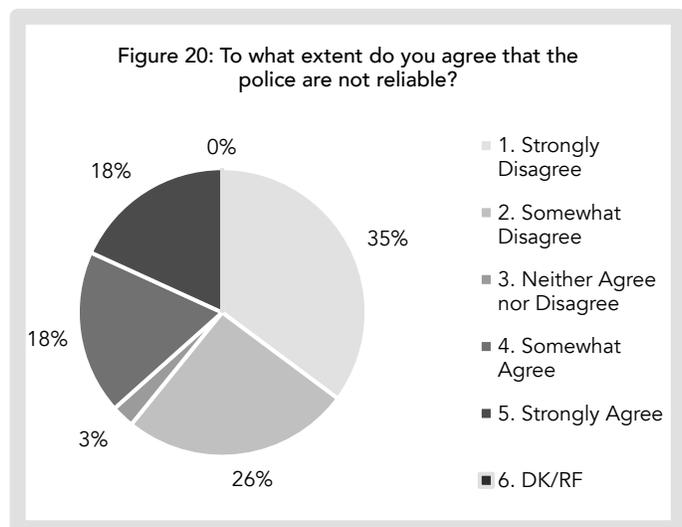
#### Views in regard to the effectiveness of civil courts are mixed among locals.

Jordan has three main types of courts: civil, religious, and the State Security Court, out of which the civil courts handle civil and regular criminal cases. However, views on the effectiveness of civil courts were mixed; 48 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that civil courts in Jordan are not effective, while 48 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 19). In addition to these, tribes sometimes play an informal role in the local justice system, although recourse to customary law based on tribal justice is controversial, as have complained that tribal settlements undermine the judicial system.<sup>142</sup>



#### Confidence in the reliability of the police is strong but some locals maintain that the police presence in Salt is inadequate.

While most respondents expressed confidence in the reliability of the police and 61 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the police are not reliable, 36 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 20). In particular, there are concerns that the police presence in Salt is inadequate, with some even reporting that the police has largely been absent since demonstrations in November 2012, which erupted after the announcement of fuel price hikes by Prime Minister Ensour and during which police checkpoints were burnt that have not been rebuilt. However, some also speculated that the absence of the police might be the result of tribal pressure.<sup>143</sup> There are also concerns that government officials have not taken adequate steps to mitigate police violence, for instance during an incident in which the police attacked a house in Salt



<sup>142</sup> Al Khalidi, Suleiman 2011. 'Tribal feuds threaten Jordan's stability', Reuters, January 13, 2011.

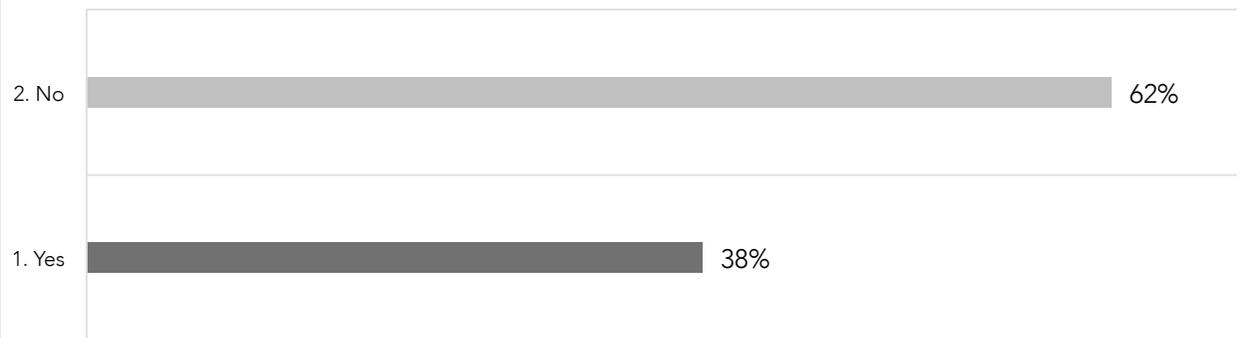
<sup>143</sup> "The state is also not doing its job, while these Islamic groups are terrorizing the people. For example, during Habet Tichreen, there were checkpoints for the police that were burnt, and the state didn't rebuild the checkpoints. Now the police are only present outside of Salt. The tribal nature of Salt could be a factor in this, as the anger is tribal

during a visit by former Interior Minister Hussein Al Magali.<sup>144</sup> As a consequence, while a majority (62 percent) of respondents reported that they or their family members have not directly suffered from excessive police authority, a significant minority (38 percent) reported that they had (see Figure 21).

*“The most important thing is that a human being is secure; he loses his humanity when he doesn’t feel secure. When a person feels there is no hope in the future, they see they are poor, and their families are living in horrible economic conditions. There is no security in Jordan; people don’t feel safe.”*

*(Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)*

Figure 21: Have you or your family directly suffered from excessive police authority?



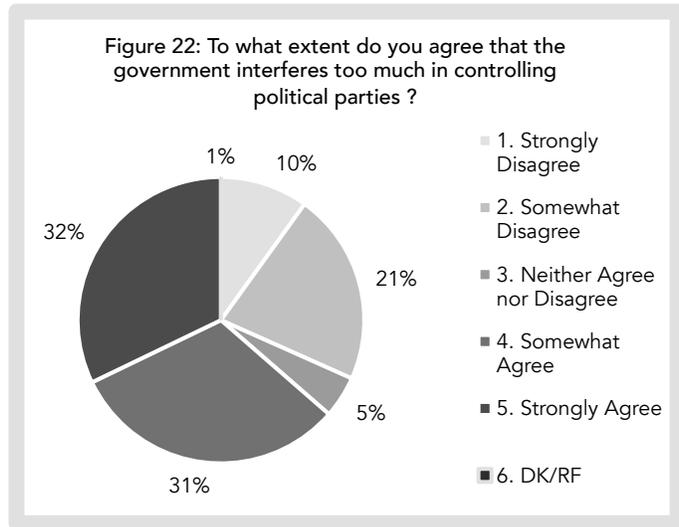
as well. Those that burnt the checkpoints were from different groups, Islamic and non-Islamic. Usually the state is careful while dealing with Salt considering its tribal nature. Islamic and non-Islamic groups went down to the street for the same requests.” (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>144</sup> “Hussein Al Majali coming to the city of Salt and standing in the street while the police were attacking a house in there and his attitude toward the situation in the city of Ma’an. This made a very negative reaction. We should follow the vision of King Abdullah to be on the safe side. If the government suppresses citizens, this will generate a sort of extremism in the country. We should support, protect our people.” (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

### 3.3 HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

There are serious concerns that the government restricts political and civil freedoms and many locals link such restrictions contribute to greater propensity toward VE.

Most respondents expressed concern that the government interferes too much in controlling political parties. In particular, many students are concerned over limitations of participating in political parties, as students who receive financial aid from the government, such as army or tribal scholarships, are not permitted to join political parties and/or participate in political acts. As a result, some students are concerned that their political freedoms are infringed upon, especially as they are restricted from addressing issues relevant to them as students.<sup>145</sup> Accordingly, 63 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the government interferes too



much in controlling political parties, while 31 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 22). Some respondents also highlighted that barriers to political involvement have seemingly pushed some Jordanians to join VEOs, often citing the example of the Amman resident Jihad Ghaban, who left Jordan to join a VEO in Syria after the HIRAK movement disintegrated and he failed to integrate in a national political party. In fact, several respondents alleged that, rather than focusing on achieving political reforms, some groups, such as Salafist Jihadists and the MB, took advantage of demonstrations in 2011 and 2012 to promote their more radical agendas,<sup>146</sup> which suggests that links between members of the HIRAK movement and Islamist groups were already formed as early as 2011 and 2012.

While most respondents expressed confidence in the counter radicalization strategies of the government, many raised concerns that it does not respect human rights and freedoms. Specifically, 32 and 35 percent of Balqa GQ respondents respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the government does not respect people's human rights and freedoms and that the government uses its anti-terrorism laws as an excuse to control others, while 62 and 58 percent respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figures 23 and 24). More specifically, locals are concerned that cases are indiscriminately being submitted to the State Security Court, which is administered by the JAF. In particular, locals highlighted the dangers of accusing locals of participation in terrorist attacks without evidence, explaining that targeting innocent

<sup>145</sup> "Some students receive grants, specifically army grants and tribal grants. These require the students not to belong to any political party or get involved on any political acts. This leads a lot of students to feel that they don't have the right to belong to any political movements, and even if those movements talk about them and about what they want." (Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)

<sup>146</sup> "From the beginning of the Arab Spring, we had people who wanted reform and we had others who lacked awareness, maybe had different agendas, although I don't like using the word agenda." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

civilians risks increasing resentment toward the government and radicalizing locals.<sup>147</sup> For instance, in one incident members of a local community in Salt from which a man allegedly planned terrorist attacks were solely arrested for being from the same area as the principal suspect.<sup>148</sup>

*“Jihad Ghaban left to join the fight in Syria, the political parties rejected him. Political parties laughed at him, because he is from the MB and wanted to join a leftist party. He was stuck in the loop with the political parties. When he died, I said that they were the only party that managed to nurture him as a human being and accept his ideas and thoughts.”*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

Figure 23: To what extent do you agree that the government does not respect people's human rights and freedoms?

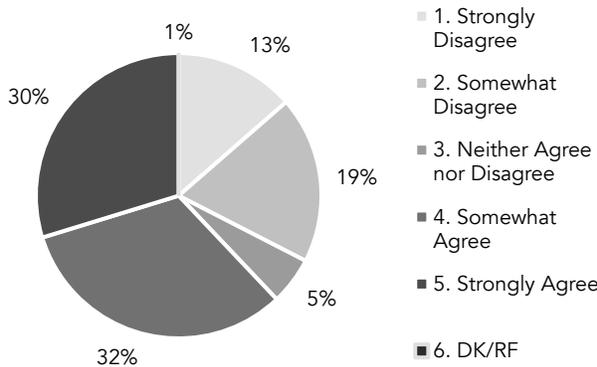
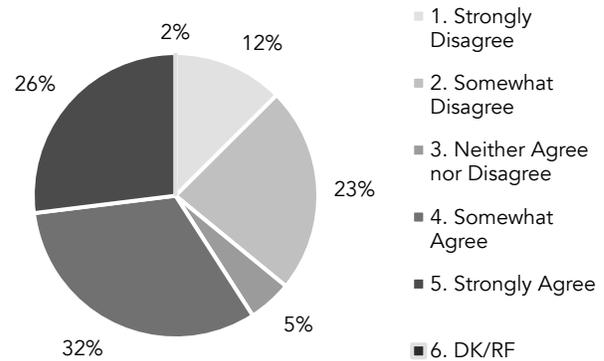


Figure 24: To what extent do you agree that the government uses its anti-terrorism laws as an excuse to control others?

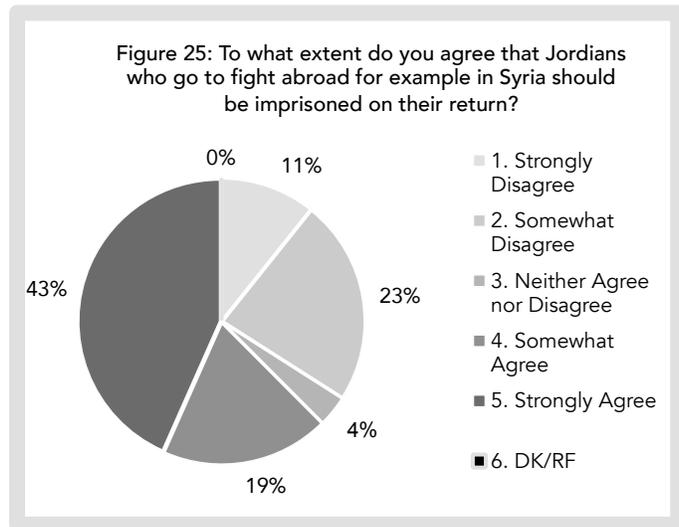


<sup>147</sup> “When the government had Mohammad Jameel Arabiat under arrest for suspicion of killing a diplomat. We were demanding his release. We went to the house of the PM and he told us to watch the media after releasing him. When the government tries to close a case by accusing a specific person who is actually innocent, this creates a place for extremism to spread and stay in the minds of people. We had some clashes with the police and some problems with the kingdom’s institutions among others. That doesn’t mean that we are above the law, but the power of the community of Salt city played a major role in that case.” (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>148</sup> “In one of the cases moved recently to the State Security Court involved a man who planned terrorist attacks in the city of Salt and resulted in the arrest of few people just because they lived in the same neighborhood and were indirectly involved. After all, the public opinion continues to blame the local community for welcoming extremists.” (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

**Support for the arrest of returned fighters is strong but many locals are concerned that the government strategy to counter radicalization is excessively focused on physical security.**

Most respondents expressed concern that returned fighters might pose a threat to the national security of the country, and for instance engage in recruitment activities in Jordan upon their return, perhaps even with the support of other countries.<sup>149</sup> For instance, one respondent who has two relatives who joined ISIS in Syria that have since returned confirmed that he is concerned that they might engage in recruitment activities in Jordan, mainly because they have retained a VE mindset.<sup>150</sup> Accordingly, 62 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Jordanians who go to fight abroad should be imprisoned on their return, while 34 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 25). However, there are growing concerns that the government approach to countering radicalization and VEOs in Jordan is excessively focused on physical security and incarceration, is based on a Western model that fails to address socioeconomic problems, and therefore has the potential to backfire, for instance because imprisoning radicalized individuals drives sympathy for them and thereby risks elevating their status in their communities.<sup>151</sup> As a result, some suggested that instead of imprisoning fighters upon their return and then releasing them after several weeks, the government should invest in rehabilitation programs,<sup>152</sup> with some citing those available in Saudi Arabia as a model of



<sup>149</sup> "There is a danger of the around 2,000 Jordanians who have gone to fight in Syria returning to Jordan and recruiting a greater number of Jordanians, for instance with the help of foreign support. If we reached a point at which there are 2,000 people joining to fight, then this is huge. If those people who left come back here, they may even double if they found support from any other country; they might even become 100,000 or 50,000. They can recruit many people who are unemployed. They don't have to be religious. They can be troublemakers and they would join the fight inside Syria." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>150</sup> "[My two relatives who joined ISIS] came back to Salt from Australia three years ago, during the Arab Spring. After a couple of years, they went to Turkey and from there they headed to fight in Syria. These two youths are still very committed and very religious, I still am worried about those two, the idea of moving between extremes and joining ISIS is very dangerous, their convictions and ideology is changeable and leads toward violence." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>151</sup> "As for [Zaki Bani] Irsheid, he is a radical person, but we didn't handle his case well in Jordan. When we talk about such a person and drive sympathy for him because this person is jailed, you know how people are here, and they sympathize with him. We can't treat him as a hero. This person was with the MB and he believes that their role is beyond our country and that our government must be overthrown. I'm not convinced of what he thinks. I believe in my country. Even his speeches are very radical." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>152</sup> "Returned VEO members should not be imprisoned. There should be a kind of rehabilitation. The government is not doing anything in this regard. They have been brainwashed and so there needs to be work on them to return

a successful program.<sup>153</sup> Some respondents also warned that the perception of a government security crackdown on returned fighters presents an obstacle to demobilization and reintegration because a fear of incarceration keeps fighters who would have otherwise liked to return to Jordan in Syria,<sup>154</sup> highlighting that misinformation contributed to recruitment into VEOs and that, if their return were to be facilitated by the government, a large number of Jordanian fighters would likely return to Jordan.<sup>155</sup> In this sense, returned fighters could be a valuable source of counter narratives that could act as a barrier to the recruitment of locals into VEOs. In addition, respondents maintained that the focus should instead be on achieving sustainable economic development in vulnerable communities.<sup>156</sup>

*"The Jordanian government is trying to combat radicalization in Jordan. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes they fail. For instance, they failed when they developed the National Strategy to Combat Extremism, which was developed by the ministries. They worked on addressing religious speeches and approach in mosques, harsher punishment, the laws, and they promised economic improvement. They actually went ahead with harsher punishments and were hard on people. Jordan was not forgiving toward the people. For example, if someone returned from Syria, this person would be treated with extreme measures and sentences to 10 years in prison. The state was not tolerant; it was very extreme and strict and they didn't succeed in creating any real economic empowerment. They didn't provide job opportunities."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

them back to normal. The government imprisons them and interrogates them, and then they are released. They should not be released as they are." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>153</sup> "I am amazed when I heard that in Saudi Arabia they provide them with rehabilitation and this really requires long rehabilitation, even if they return to a moderate mentality, this does not happen overnight, neither by telephone... I defined the state as a central point for extremism, they bring them there and they try and change their ideology, and I heard that they have succeeded in doing so. I do not know how true this is, but I wish we had this in Jordan, a center like that for rehabilitation." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

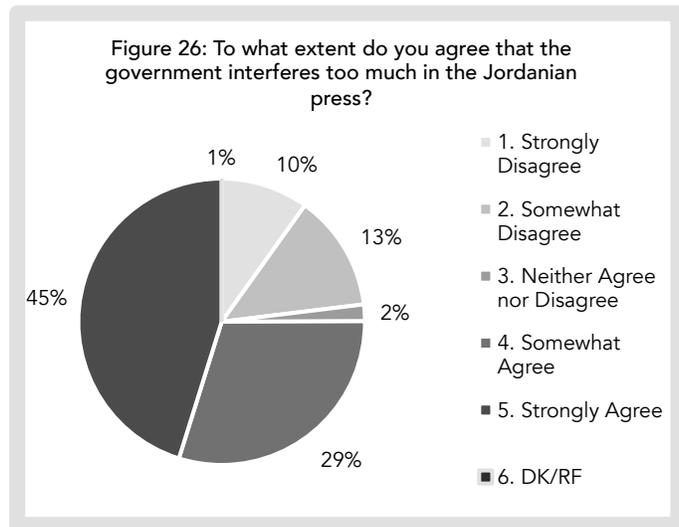
<sup>154</sup> "I know that four people died in Syria... Another was an ex-convict, sentenced for shooting at the intelligence. He denied that he did this. However, he went and blew himself up. He was with the Salafist Jihadists. Since he was wanted by the state, he decided to go and die to go to heaven rather than rot in prison." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>155</sup> "A group of Jordanians went to Syria because they were lured, and I am sure that they cannot return, so after they become militarized there and the situation there they were fooled, they didn't know the situation. When they arrived they noticed this but couldn't return. Returning from Syria is not easy." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>156</sup> "When we face such a problem, this is evidence that we have to have different approaches when it comes to fighting terrorism. I think that we have to take care of the little details when it comes to terrorism. I think terrorism becomes a bigger issue when we ignore these details. I believe that our security forces should treat 90 percent of cases of terrorism through development, not through arresting people." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

There are serious concerns among locals that the central government curtails freedom of the press.

Fears that the government restricts press freedoms are widespread. In particular, locals are concerned over amendments to the press and publications law that were passed in 2012 and that extended restrictions and licensing requirements to news websites, resulting in increased censorship of online content.<sup>157</sup> There have been rumors over the closure of multiple online news sources, such as the website 7iber for example. Accordingly, 74 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press, while only 23 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 26). Although changes in press laws have not helped to facilitate media activity in practice, some nevertheless maintain that the government is taking steps to improve freedom of the press and is also doing so in response to persistent protests by members of the public.



*"After the new publications law, people started to hear some news about the closure of some news agencies even for small periods of time. One example is the website 7iber. Now people think that it looks like Jordan is taking steps toward freedom of the press but there have been a lot of protests calling for greater freedom of the press."*

*(Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)*

<sup>157</sup> Freedom House 2014. 'Freedom of the Press 2014: Jordan', Freedom House, 2014.

## 4.0 PSYCHOSOCIAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

### 4.1 LOCUS OF CONTROL

Perceived political disenfranchisement is a serious concern for most locals who have lost faith that petitioning the government and/or voting can lead to change.

Most respondents expressed disillusionment with the possibility that petitioning the government and/or voting can achieve change in the country. 75 and 66 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed respectively that it is useless trying to get the government to listen to them and that there is no point in voting, while only 23 and 32 percent respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 27 and 28). In fact, some respondents blamed the government for radicalization in Jordan, explaining that its failure to instill a sense of national pride in local youths has left them searching for an identity and group that represents them. In this regard, the perceived lack of channels through which locals can express themselves politically is believed to contribute to radicalization, reinforcing the danger of growing government pressure on the MB, which has provided locals with an opportunity to participate in domestic political processes.

*"The failure of the Jordanian state to instill citizenship and patriotism is also to blame for radicalization... Youths tend to join the violent groups in search of an identity. They look for a party that would provide a sense of belonging."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

Figure 27: To what extent do you agree that it's useless trying to get the government listen to you?

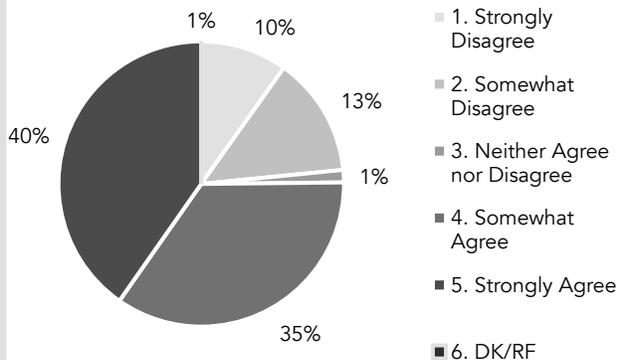
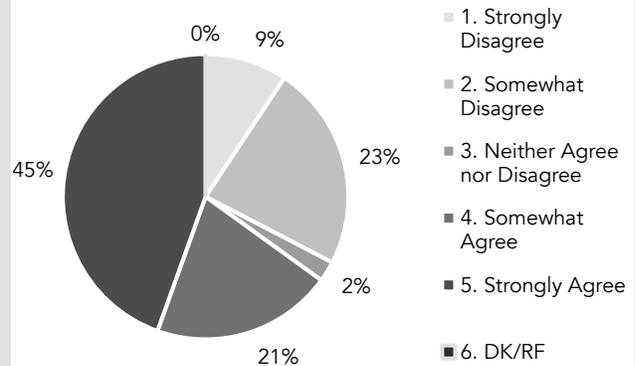
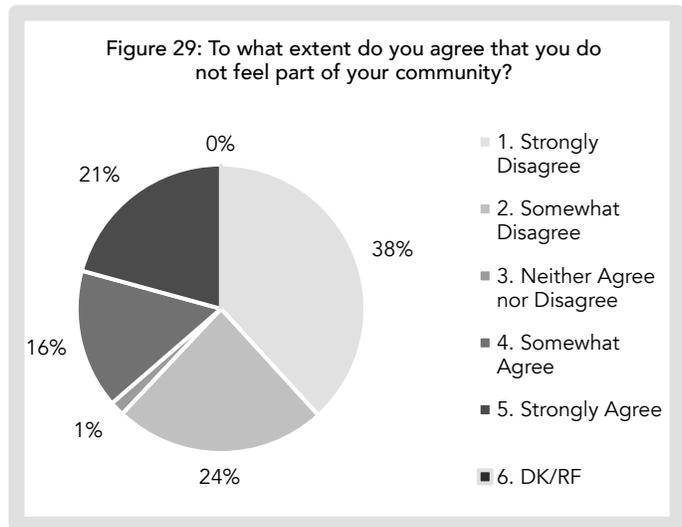


Figure 28: To what extent do you agree that you do not feel that there is a point in voting as it doesn't change anything?



**Perceived marginalization from communities drives recruitment into VEOs but most locals maintain that they feel part of their local community.**

Some respondents identified the personal circumstances of individuals that result in marginalization from their communities as key in driving their decision to leave Jordan and fight in Syria or Iraq and identified a number of factors that contribute to a sense of marginalization among locals, including among others: a perceived lack of a national identity within Jordan, their local community, and/or their tribe;<sup>158</sup> and psychological and/or family problems,<sup>159</sup> such as suffering physical abuse as children,<sup>160</sup> grief after the death of a relative, a sense of failure after losing their jobs, trauma after sexual abuse, and a sense of failure after the end of a relationship.<sup>161</sup> Some respondents also highlighted that VEO narratives that promise potential recruits social integration resonate with local youths,<sup>162</sup> for instance because they promise to help shape their identities by providing them with intellectual and religious frameworks, a physical routine, and even physical pleasure by promising them women.<sup>163</sup>



In particular, perceived marginalization is also linked to radicalization and recruitment into VEOs because the Salafist Jihadist community welcomes, and in some instances even directly targets, marginalized persons,<sup>164</sup> such as mentally challenged individuals,<sup>165</sup> troublemakers, and other outcasts, sometimes even

<sup>158</sup> "I spoke to a brother of someone who went to fight in Syria. His brother was imprisoned here for security reasons... They are a very good family, they weren't marginalized, they were educated, and socially they were doing well. They felt an injustice and they were searching for an identity." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>159</sup> "People with a radical ideology have problems and come from specific backgrounds. Their problems could be family problems or psychological problems. These problems cause them pressure and ultimately drive them to express their anger in other means and toward extremism." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>160</sup> "Upbringing matters; at home, I remember that my father only hit me once and it was because I hit my sister and after that I didn't hit my sister and my father didn't hit me. Violent extremism starts at the very beginning, at home and at school." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>161</sup> "One of my friends, following a failed love relationship, quit drinking, started going to the mosque. This failure pushed him to become more committed religiously." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>162</sup> "Social messages are effective, saying that they get social appreciation." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>163</sup> "It is an attractive deal for youths. They are satisfying the bodies, minds, and souls of youths, in addition to women of course. The youths don't have to go find their own way anymore, look for jobs or an income. They facilitate this for them, so youths tend to join." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>164</sup> "Islamic groups tend to go to people who are frustrated and they work on brainwashing them while they are down. There are no morals in society, no effective roles for them in society, and there might be economic reasons as well as identity issues, such as soul searching." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

celebrating their reformation as success stories.<sup>166</sup> Notably, the Salafist Jihadist community in Balqa is a community that has become increasingly closed in recent years and its members have become more guarded in their exchanges with other locals.<sup>167</sup> This suggests that individuals who become Salafist Jihadists become increasingly marginalized from their communities, notably also often their immediate family members and tribes, and thereby also become more resistant to the influence factors that would otherwise constitute barriers to their recruitment.<sup>168</sup> While most respondents (62 percent) reported feeling a part of their community, a significant minority (37 percent) reported that they do not, which suggests that many locals youths are searching for communities to integrate in and identify with (see Figure 29).

*"He was a very normal guy and wasn't very religious but after he was kicked out of the military, some Salafist religious figures visited him and brainwashed him with religious messages. Extremists have a sympathy approach; radical people take advantage of a person's situation. Some guy I knew lost his father, and he died in Syria. VEOs contacted him and told him that Shia groups killed his father and they said they will avenge his father and he became very emotional and wanted to avenge his father as a result of the stories he was told. They were able to play with his mind through social media, which is used to attract people. I see that it is my responsibility to reach out to people."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

*"One example would be that of a person who was very extreme, alcoholic, he smells, is thinner, and long ago, he was sexually harassed by his friends. He was imprisoned because of a fight. When he got out of prison, he became religiously committed, was influenced by a group of Salafist Jihadists. He stayed at home for a long time. He memorized the Qur'an and he volunteered to work as a servant of the mosque, which would be Khaled Bin Al Walid Mosque in Baqa'a refugee camp. He rejected working with the government because he considers the kingdom a blasphemous infidel state. He would work at bakeries, supermarkets, yet he failed at everything he did. He is still at the*

<sup>165</sup> "I know that four people died in Syria... One was someone who was not mentally well and who was laughed at by society. They joined Salafist Jihadists that gave them a place to express themselves with people who listened to him. He joined JN. He died after a long time with JN." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>166</sup> "A man called Assad Saleh in our region was a troublemaker but when he was 10 or 12 years old he was taught religious beliefs. He was a radical troublemaker and then became a radical religious person and the radical groups don't mind his past. They feel proud that he changed. He was always drunk. He is a success story in their minds. He was a loser." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>167</sup> "I know many people in Salt, I know public figures, I have also sat with Salafist Jihadists in Salt, this year and in previous years, however we didn't speak about any serious matters. I was trying to get to know them so that I could establish some sort of relationship. But they actually avoided me when they know I was working in cinema and arts and theatre. I even tried to establish a relationship with a Salafist that owns a mobile shop, I used to buy my phones and cards from him, however he never opened up to me and I failed in managing to sit with him, although I tried. I wanted to know how he thinks. I feel that their leaders warn them from speaking to anyone about their movement, they are very careful." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>168</sup> "Salafists also don't come to weddings because there are songs and they isolate themselves from their families completely. It seems like there is no way to change their minds once they adopt such behavior." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

*camp, he is still as violent, and he attends demonstrations. He was present at the Salafist Jihadist demonstration that took place in Zarqa, which the police raided, to improve the conditions of the convicts in jail in 2011."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

**Focus: Youth clubs in Balqa can help vulnerable children, such as orphans and refugees, integrate into their communities and provide and provide spaces for the communication of counter violent extremism messages.**

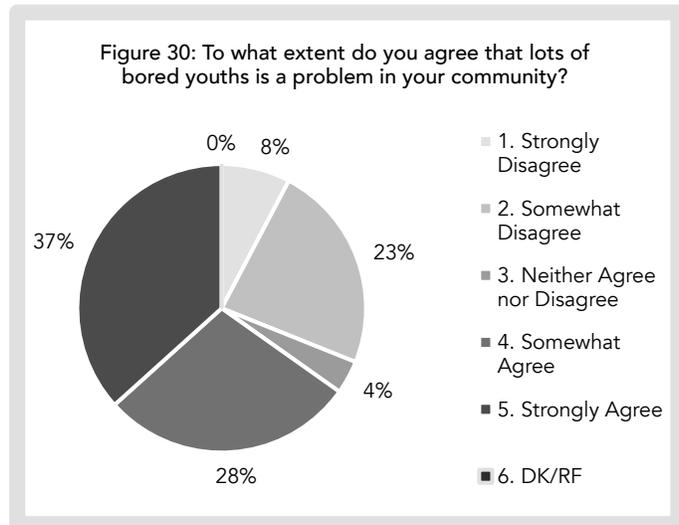
*"The Child Care Association has almost 35 youth members and works on the rehabilitation of youth. They have 15 girls volunteering with them from Jordan and outside... [there are] Americans, Australians, and Koreans volunteering with them as well as Shia volunteers... In this association, each volunteer works on a certain subject. They work every Friday, they also get training, but every Friday and Saturday they go and train children who are orphans or refugees. The association welcomes almost 15 to 20 kids. The kids feel like this is their teacher, their mentor. They also teach music, since some of the volunteers love music. The volunteers also work with the kids on how to use social media in the right way. There are also cultural programs, even religious ones. Many programs show religion in a good way, and they show that radicalism does not represent religion. They give religious programs, so these kids won't be an easy target for radical groups. They have several programs in music and sports, computer, crafts, art, paintings, also radio programs.*

*Those kids are around 16 years old. They see real success stories. If a person is creative or a doctor, they see that directly. The volunteers would, for example, take the youths to a clinic to visit a doctor and conduct an interview with him, and ask questions, they can see what happened to him, then they can make a magazine and publish the interview they conducted with the doctor. We have almost 150 kids in the society and, by the way, the program recruits both sexes. We also focus on mental health in the association. Kids who come to the association can be orphans or have mothers who are deceased or their father or both, or have social problems, or they can feel marginalized. Volunteers can help in supporting them regarding mental health problems, so at least they won't feel marginalized, especially since they lost their parents. In the office here we conduct summer camps as well as winter camps.*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

### Local youths are viewed as the most vulnerable demographic to recruitment into VEOs.

Many respondents expressed the view that male youths in Balqa are especially vulnerable to recruitment into VEOs when compared to other age groups and identified age as a more important driver of propensity toward VE than other factors, including heritage, level of education, tribal affiliation,<sup>169</sup> employment status, and level of income. In particular, several respondents explained that a general lack of awareness and greater financial concerns among male youths are reasons that they are more vulnerable than older locals.<sup>170</sup> Crucially, most respondents indicated that the high number of bored youths in their community is a concern and 65 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that lots of bored youths is a problem in their community, while 31 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 30). Since most agree that youths are the most vulnerable to radicalization, there is strong support for government programs that target youths and offer them educational and recreational opportunities,<sup>171</sup> as well as programs that create private sector jobs, as there are few jobs in the public sector.<sup>172</sup>



*“Extremism is very deep in our society, especially among youths in Balqa. It affects youths so intensely. It has started to spread in Salt... It is mostly youths, from 20 to 25 years of age, who are single males, who are most at risk of radicalization. They can be poor or not poor. Some would be unemployed and they would join and some others would have a good job and still go... Some students as well, like a medical student, [have joined VEOs].” (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa’a)*

<sup>169</sup> “Most of the people that I know that left to fight in Syria were 16 to 30 years old. I haven’t heard about any females who left from Salt. Most these people are educated, moderately. They don’t come from specific tribes; some are Jordanian and some are from Palestinian origins, whether they are Palestinian or Jordanian doesn’t matter, once these people are convinced of what ISIS and these groups are promoting. Some people left without an idea of how they could join VEOs, mostly aiming to join ISIS.” (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>170</sup> “[Those who join VEOs do so] for economic reasons, are aged between 22 and 37, and are males.” (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

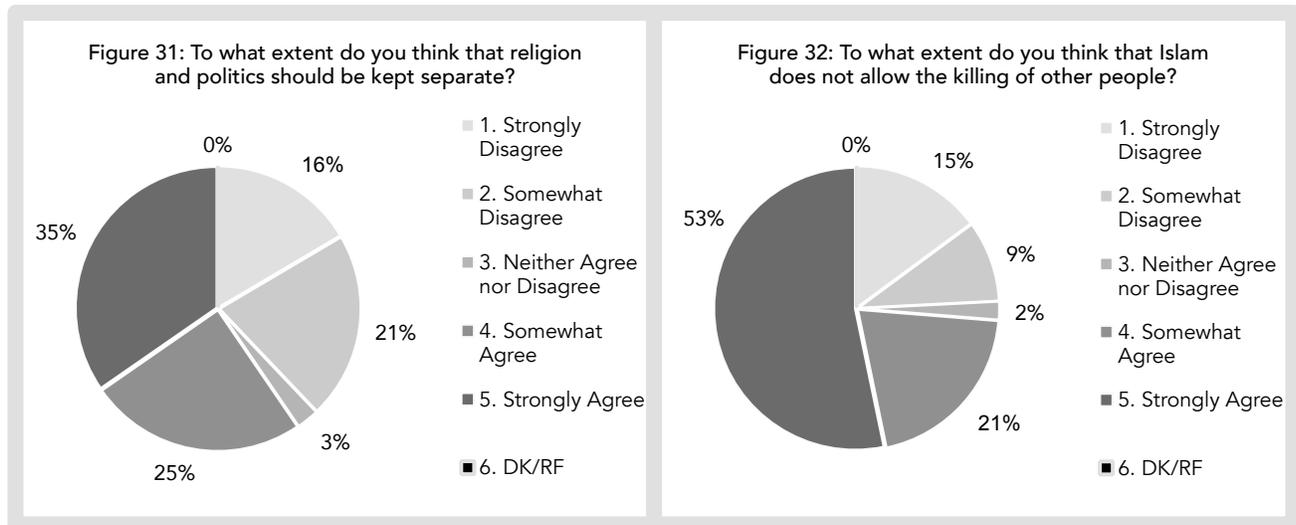
<sup>171</sup> “His Majesty the King proposed something that focuses on youths, in order to attract these youths to not think about other things, but the youths which do not have such centers, or have places to play football or employment opportunities, they are in the streets, they chit chat here and there and they read, these are the problematic ones.” (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>172</sup> “I always say that that the public sector is completely full and we cannot increase the number of individuals working in the public sector, so we need to now focus on the private sector, and investment, and this investment we are speaking of can help employ a large number of these youths.” (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

## 4.2 RELIGIOUS VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Religious incentives are viewed as the main drivers of recruitment into VEOs and, despite growing opposition to radical religious groups, many locals continue to hold strong religious views.

Most respondents agreed that religious drivers are key in increasing propensity toward VE, and several respondents described how locals they know became increasingly religious and were mainly motivated to join VEOs in Syria for religious reasons. In particular, promises of religious benefits, such as status as a martyr, acceptance into heaven, and the Hoor Al Ayn [chaste women in heaven], were identified as strong motivators for joining VEOs and as stronger than political drivers for instance, such as achieving the liberation of Syria<sup>173</sup> or drivers associated with particular VEOs.<sup>174</sup> As a consequence, some locals who left to join VEOs in Syria mainly intended to participate in jihad and only determined which VEO to join upon their arrival,<sup>175</sup> and some others viewed jihad in Syria as a religiously sanctioned means of committing suicide and obtaining benefits in heaven.<sup>176</sup> These religious messages have also been reinforced by religious leaders that have reportedly been making house visits and patrolling the streets, such as in Al Salalem, to encourage youths to attend prayer times, using religious rhetoric such as the lure of heaven



<sup>173</sup> "I think my relatives joined ISIS for the Hoor Al Ayn and going to heaven. I'm sure they didn't go to liberate Syria. If they go to their backyard they can see Palestine, where they can fight and die as martyrs. Palestine is much closer to Salt, it is much closer than Syria, but they went for the Hoor Al Ayn... they went there to go to heaven and get the Hoor Al Ayn. They were religious in Australia and became more committed when they came to stay in Salt after they finished their studies." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>174</sup> "I know that one of them left to Syria without being recruited or knowing where he was going. He thought he was joining jihad. He was happy to be shot dead at the border; he just wanted to be a martyr." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>175</sup> "Many of the people just left to Syria and were recruited by the different groups there. So many left clueless, they just wanted to go participate in jihad to raise the name of God; on how to join the fight, they were found there and then recruited." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>176</sup> "Some went to Syria to commit suicide. They wouldn't do it here, and it is easier to go do it there and get called a martyr." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

and threats of divine punishment to put pressure on youths.<sup>177</sup> While there has been an increasing rejection of radical religious groups and views among the wider population in Balqa, quantitative findings confirm that many continue to hold strong religious views, with most rejecting the separation of religion and politics: Specifically, 60 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that religion and politics should be kept separate, while 37 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 31). However, most support non-violence in Islam and 74 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Islam does not allow the killing of other people, while 24 percent respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 32).

*"Sex is an effective message, saying that they get Sabaya, female slaves; they can go choose their female slaves from markets... They get four wives and slaves... Hoor Al Ayn [chaste women promised to martyrs in heaven]. The promise of heaven is an effective message, which includes four wives plus an indescribable number of female slaves. It is strange that they have this backwards attitude. Today a guy can go meet a girl and fall in love with her and be with her. They are thinking backwards and joining jihad to be with girls and going back to the female slave markets."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

### **Some religious leaders are seen as driving acceptance of, and recruitment into, VEOs in Salt.**

Many respondents identified religious leaders as contributing to radicalization in Balqa and warned that the government needs to address the rhetoric used by imams at local mosques. For instance, some complained that government endorsed imams have failed to positively influence locals, as many cannot identify with the content of their preaching, which is regarded as inflexible and out of touch with youths, and as a result of which some are pulled toward more radical currents with which they can more easily identify.<sup>178</sup> Several respondents also raised concerns that the government, and Ministry of Religious Affairs in particular, is not doing enough to monitor legal and government-appointed imams, not to mention imams at illegal mosques. For instance, one respondent alleged that some of the state-appointed imams

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<sup>177</sup> "The sheikhs are going around to houses, they would see youths standing in the street to pray, and would encourage them to come attend religious sessions. They use an encouraging approach; they promote Islam. However, they speak about hell and the punishment of those that don't follow Islam. For instance, in the Al Salalem area in Salt, I was standing with a group of youths when a preacher came to us to tell us to join prayer. We told him that we are waiting for a friend and we will follow. He said he would stay with us, and started telling us about heaven and hell, and started preaching. This was a year, a year and a half ago, around the end of 2014. When we told them we were in a hurry, they went away. I was shocked when this happened, as it was a first, however the youths that were with me weren't surprised, as this is a recurring event." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>178</sup> "I believe there is a role for tribal leaders and religious leaders. The preaching at mosques has no relevance to our reality or content in general. They don't speak of anything that matters. For example, when someone goes to pray at the mosque, they block other cars, disregarding the possibility that others might have emergencies. To them, it is prayer time, a religious feeling should prevail, and nothing else should come in the way of prayer. Even if they had to block other cars, to me this is a sign of extremism, as these people only think of themselves, and they feel entitled to close up the town because they are going to pray. If you're going to pray, you can do whatever you want." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

in Salt are Salafist Jihadists.<sup>179</sup> Further, while religious leaders are influential leaders in communities vulnerable to VE, working with religious leaders in Balqa to counter radicalization would be counter-productive when many of them are radical.<sup>180</sup>

*"There is an imam that we have, that teaches the way of life according to [Muhammad Nasiruddin] Al Albani and [Abd Al Aziz] Ibn Baz. This is spreading a lot of extremism in our society. He does this at Friday prayers at the mosque. He is in Salt. This was during 2013. In 2013, I felt the danger of Islamic groups and how they lead to extremism in Salt. I have a lot of relatives that work as imams at mosques. They tell me that many are being chased by the government and intelligence officers at mosques for preaching Salafist Jihadist lectures and for calling people infidels. They start by teaching people that if their daughter leaves unveiled, then she is going to hell; if you are in a mixed gender environment, then you are going to hell; if your next door neighbor is Christian, then it is [forbidden] to congratulate them during their holidays."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

### **Anti-Christian sentiment and Muslim-Christian tensions are on the rise, most noticeably in Salt.**

Balqa has been hailed as an example of inter-communal harmony between its Muslim and Christian communities for decades, and especially mixed Christian and Muslim neighborhoods, such as Rmeimeen,<sup>181</sup> and many respondents pointed toward the rich history of the governorate and mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds of locals to illustrate that modern-day tensions and hate speech constitute a new development.<sup>182</sup> While most Balqa GQ respondents (64 percent) continue to support the view that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose (see Figure 33), inter communal relations between Muslims and Christians in Balqa have been deteriorating. This has been apparent on social media and at gatherings such as funerals, where Muslim locals are increasingly voicing criticism of the presence of Christians.<sup>183</sup> Some murders that have taken place in the governorate have also been framed

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<sup>179</sup> "Some of our imams at mosques are Salafist Jihadists, they were appointed by the state. The people are stupid and the state is stupid I feel [because it has failed to adequately monitor their activities]." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>180</sup> "People that would have influence on the society are usually sheikhs; you cannot have an atheist speaking to the extremist groups. No one can influence people other than the sheikhs and they are terrorists themselves. I feel that only sheikhs would be able to have influence and that is counter-productive." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>181</sup> Goussous, Suzanna 2016. 'Church bells, hymns mark opening of revamped neighboring mosque', Jordan Times, 16 January 2016.

<sup>182</sup> "The government initially arrested many Salafist Jihadists in Salt and the people who go to mosques regularly refused their ideas. The city of Salt has many origins: Nablus, Khalil, Kurds, Christians, etc., so this hate speech and refusing others was actually against the nature of the city." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>183</sup> "People now speak of having Muslim and Christian citizens in the area. We now have different reactions for people on social media criticizing Christians. In mourning houses you see people talking about it and even having fights sometimes... Now we hear of conversations in Salt about the presence of Christians in the city and coexistence." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

in religious terms, even though they were more likely unrelated to religion.<sup>184</sup> Worryingly, support for the view that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims was found to be very strong. While 55 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims, as many as 41 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 34). In particular, some respondents attributed an increase in hostility toward Christians among Muslims to the education system, citing inflammatory excerpts from books used in non-religious subjects and religious education courses as in part responsible for heightened tensions,<sup>185</sup> as well as the increased presence and influence of Salafist Jihadists and radical preaching at mosques. For instance, some imams in Balqa preach that it is forbidden to congratulate Christians on Christian holidays.<sup>186</sup> Such messages are also reinforced by members of the Salafist Jihadist community online, most notably on Facebook, who also operates from outside of the governorate and country.<sup>187</sup> In addition, the interference by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in some conflicts, for instance in conflicts over the proximity of churches to mosques, appears to have made the situation worse in some instances by deepening rather than bridging divides.<sup>188</sup> One respondent also attributed worsened relations between Muslims and Christians to rhetoric in Parliament, explaining that there needs to be greater emphasis on a unified Jordanian identity, rather than on divisions.<sup>189</sup> Notably, the Ana Atajarra’a Initiative [I-Dare], which has reportedly been funded by

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<sup>184</sup> “The Haddad story, their son was killed, and at that time there were four or five Christians that were killed in different crimes, and this resulted in Christian anger. It isn’t justified of course and it was blown out of proportion. It was a story of personal differences. It wasn’t Salafists that carried out the attack.” (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>185</sup> “We have problems with our curriculums, like having language like ‘the Jews and Christians will never tolerate you’ from the Qur’an in the Arabic book for seventh graders and you ask the Christian child to read it, memorize it, and you test him about it. They would get offended but this never escalated. But now they speak publicly. This would cause conflict in society; it could create a state of extremism.” (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>186</sup> “They start by teaching people that if their daughter leaves unveiled then she is going to hell, if you are in a mixed gender environment you are going to hell, if your next door neighbor is Christian, then it is haram to congratulate them during their holidays.” (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>187</sup> “These people who communicate using Facebook present some kinds of ideas such as Muslims are not supposed to congratulate Christians on their holidays. This kind of speech was never heard in Jordan before. These people are trying to affect the Jordanians from outside by using some words from the Qur’an and explain it in the way that serves their interests. This makes some Muslims in Jordan raise some questions about the subject. They are trying to prepare to start a conflict that will bring us catastrophic results if they succeed in reaching their goal. A big part of showing respect and love is actually sharing the happiness with my Christian neighbors on their holidays. That creates social peace. It helps me to create respect and love between me and my neighbor, friend, and colleagues. Salafists are doing their best to isolate Muslims from Christians inside Jordan and produce some sort of coolness and coldness in the relationship between them. This part is really important and dangerous. Salafists can use Facebook as a breeding ground to spread their radical ideas.” (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>188</sup> “We have always had the church and mosque gates facing each other, however now, after a decision from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, they cancelled both gates because they felt it wasn’t appropriate to have the mosque gate facing the church. This is happening even though in Salt, Muslims were historically a minority, and the people that built the mosques are Christians.” (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>189</sup> “We have a problem in our Parliament and how we label people. It’s wrong to say that this person is a Muslim or a Christian or a Jordanian or Palestinian, the identity for all of us is Jordanian.” (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

USAID and the European Union (EU), has been addressing the issue of religious conflict in Balqa with the aim of improving inter communal relations.<sup>190</sup>

*“The environment in Balqa has generally been positive for the last 50 years between Muslims and Christians. However, the idea that there is religious harmony is a lie. Muslims are becoming increasingly anti-Christian. Over the last 20 years the presence of takfirist and jihadist groups has become more and they have had a negative effect on the community. The percentage of Christians in Salt was bigger 50 years ago and they were able to live without conflict but now it seems like Muslims are not happy about the presence of Christians anymore. For example, we work next to a church. In response, the neighbor has a building that he wants to develop into a mosque to interfere with the church. There is a feeling that they are becoming dissatisfied [with the Christian presence].”*  
 (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

Figure 33: To what extent do you think that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose?

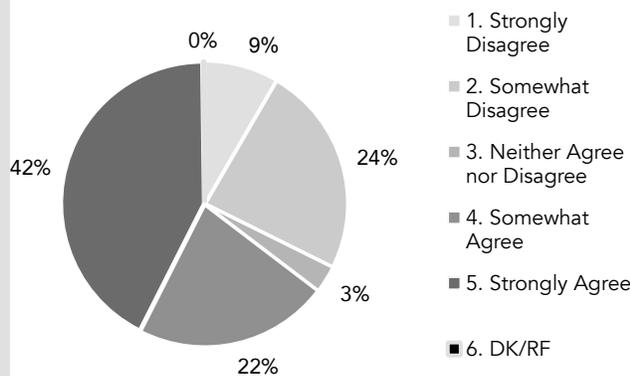
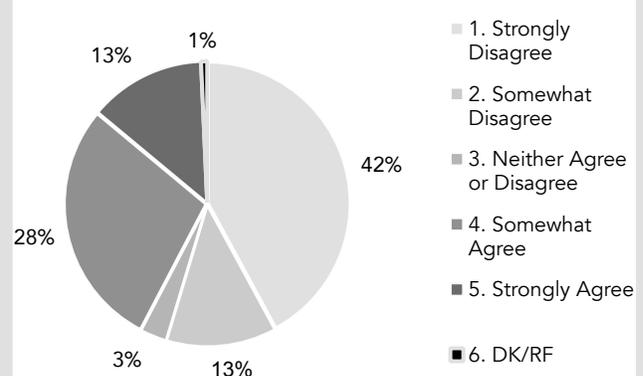


Figure 34: To what extent do you think that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims?



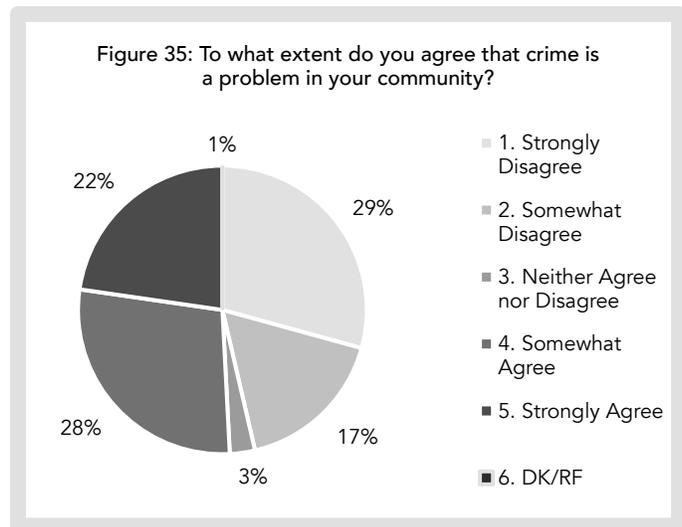
<sup>190</sup> “The Ana Atajarra’a Initiative, which is funded by the EU, touches on this issue and many other issues. Hate dialogue is used in Jordan. The initiative aims to stop the conversations of having Muslims and Christians in Jordan. Why would I reject having Christians in my country? We believe that they are important and they have a presence in Salt.” (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

### 4.3 EXPOSURE TO CRIME AND CONFLICT

Individuals with a criminal past are viewed as especially vulnerable to VEO narratives, although locals have mixed views over the extent to which crime is a problem in Balqa.

Several respondents highlighted that a number of Salafist Jihadists who left Balqa to fight in Syria were previously convicts who turned to religion in jail. For instance, several youths, who were imprisoned for crimes such as fights, theft, or sexual harassment, seemingly 'reformed' through the help of the Salafist Jihadist community while incarcerated. Respondents felt that for some criminals and former convicts, joining VEOs allow them to use religion as a cover for their continued violent mindset and even behavior.<sup>191</sup>

In fact, the Salafist Jihadists in Balqa appear to systematically target marginalized troublemakers, such as gang members, ex-convicts, and alcoholics, through social media networks and face-to-face meetings.<sup>192</sup> However, views in regard to whether crime constitutes a serious problem in Balqa were mixed, suggesting that it is a small segment of the population that is considered to be especially vulnerable to the influence of Salafist Jihadists; 50 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that crime is a problem in their community, while 46 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 35). Moreover, the vast majority (92 percent) reported that they or their family members have not directly suffered from crime (see Figure 36).



*"Many of the Salafist Jihadists are ex convicts. For example, they were imprisoned for fights, theft, or sexual harassment. Many were imprisoned, and when they came out they found this religious group to join, where they can let out all of the bottled up energy and aggressiveness they have from prison. This energy is now directed toward violence, not in street fights, but to raise the word of*

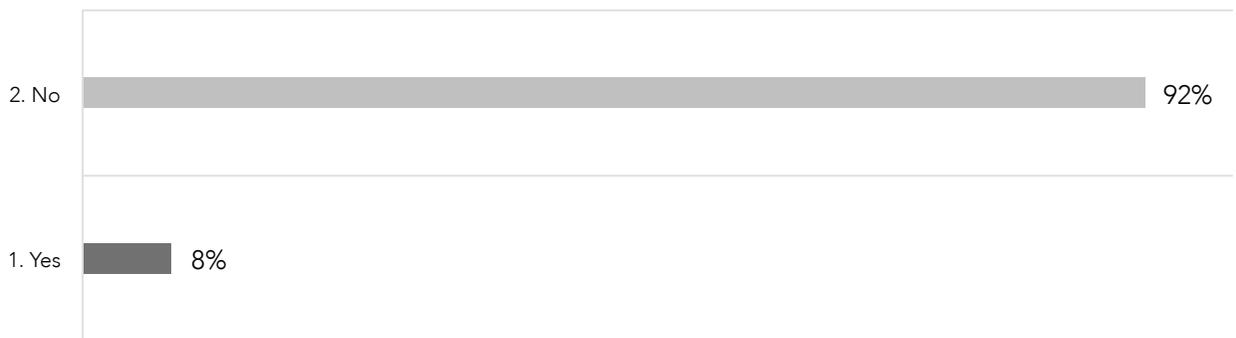
<sup>191</sup> "Many of those that are in these groups are originally violent and now they are only utilizing religion as a cover for their violence." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>192</sup> "I think that violent extremists communicate with people in my community through direct meetings. There are mostly troublemakers in Salt. They become leaders, for instance in street gangs. Honestly, I know some of them. Those troublemakers did not have religious thoughts and then suddenly they became Salafists. Radical groups take advantage of troublemakers because they are marginalized and they try to find themselves, so they find themselves in jihad. They think that they will have more influence if they become jihadist and radical. They convince them. This is how they attract them, by money as well, and they are addicted to alcohol. From the beginning troublemakers are addicted to alcohol and to have them become religious is very fishy. They knew how to brainwash them. At the beginning there was no social media so it was done by direct contact but recently they use social media as well to communicate with people." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

*God. They think of themselves as guardians of Islam... Anyone looking for a place to blow off some steam [might be vulnerable to radicalization]."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

Figure 36: Have you or your family directly suffered from crime?



**Members of prominent criminal groups, despite co-option by the government, are seen as vulnerable to VEO messaging.**

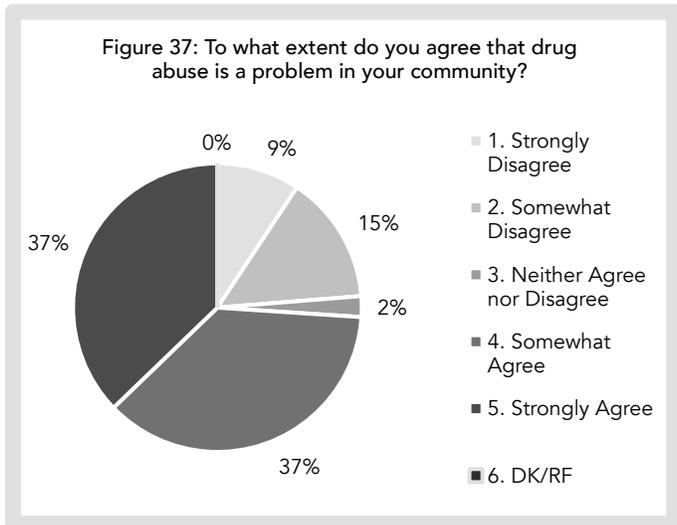
Respondents reported that members of the criminal group operating in Salt, *Al Dasa Al Fojaeyya*, of which Muthana Arabiat is the spokesman, may remain vulnerable to VE, although the influence of the group has declined in recent decades and Arabiat is reported to be making efforts to improve the image of the group and counter VE among its members. Members of the group left to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq in previous decades and were widely viewed as gang members and degenerates who turned to religion to cope with the deaths of friends and their experiences fighting abroad. While the group has rejected religious extremism, and despite targeted support from the government, some respondents highlighted that members of the group remain vulnerable to VE and recruitment into VEOs. The group also receives support from Marwan Alhmoud, who is a prominent community leader in Salt. It is also worth noting that some locals believe that the government co-opted members of the group to escalate tensions and attack peaceful protesters during Arab Spring protests on March 24, 2011. Such views reinforce the widely held perception that the government wields control over VEOs and utilizes them to achieve domestic goals, which might also undermine confidence in the government’s desire to counter VEOs.

*"Most of [those who left to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq] were gang members before. We had a generation of gangs and degenerate youths. One of them died. So most of the group became religious. They were doing well economically. They had a lot of energy and when they called for people to join jihad in Afghanistan they went. Less than half of them returned... They had an income from protection. They had jobs with the state and other institutions. You know how the state looks after the gang members, sometimes they think of them more than they do of the policemen. The generation that followed those who left to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq was not ideologically*

extremist. However, they maintain the traditions of Al Dasa Al Fojaeyya. Before it was more institutional, the state invested in this, it was much more organized. The local organizations would invest with them. Al Dasa Al Fojaeyyah are extremists, however they aren't religiously extremist, they are violent and they admit their violence. They are utilized publicly. They aren't religiously extremist, however that transformation could happen at any moment. They could be taken advantage of. They have potential and energy. They are now against religious extremism, because their leadership is against it. And they are monitored by the state as well. However, I feel that if their leadership changes its perspective and support religious extremism they could all go in that direction at any moment. Their leadership has a good relationship with the state. Previous leaderships had a good relationship with the state as well, however they were all transformed and turned extremist when one of them died. If their leadership changes they can become religiously extremist. Their leadership didn't cause trouble in Salt. When they were gang members, they were causing more trouble. When they became more extremist, they went to areas where they can fight and join jihad." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

**Drug usage among local youths is a serious concern and both alcohol and drug addiction is linked to higher propensity toward recruitment into VEOs.**

While Jordan was largely viewed as a drug transit country in the past, the majority of respondents agreed that drug abuse has become a serious problem in Balqa,<sup>193</sup> with some attributing this to the high number of bored youths in the governorate. 74 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that drug abuse is a problem in their community, while only 24 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 37). In particular, drug usage is thought to be widespread among school and university students as well as unemployed locals, and especially common in some parts of Salt, such as Al Manshieh, Al Safeh, Al Khandak, Al Ezarieh,<sup>194</sup> and Baqa'a refugee camp.<sup>195</sup> Several respondents also linked drug usage to propensity toward VE and recruitment into VEOs, reporting that some locals who left Balqa to fight in Syria had been



<sup>193</sup> "The drugs issue is a problem in Salt." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>194</sup> "Most locals agree that most local youths feel bored and don't have anything to do and believe that this is why they start to take drugs, which is widespread among youths and some of them are dealers, even in schools. Areas where drug usage is especially widespread are Al Khandak, Al Ezarieh, Al Safeh, and Al Manshieh." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

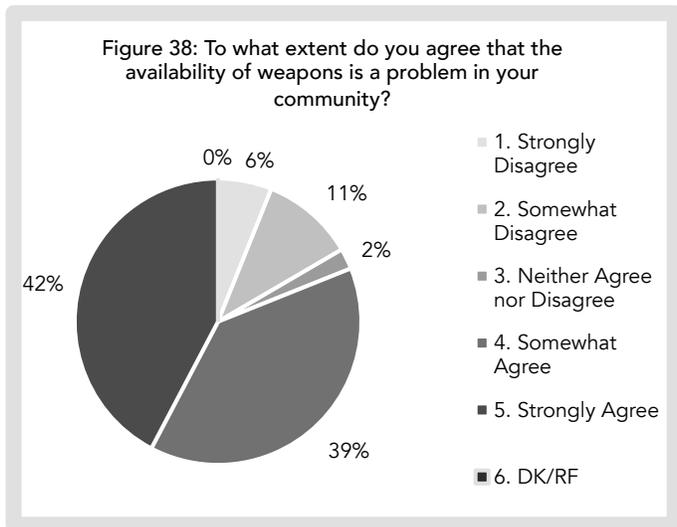
<sup>195</sup> "Drugs started to spread widely in Balqa and started to be especially common among both school and university students and unemployed people. Some started to notice that working as a drug dealer will offer you a lot of money."

alcoholics,<sup>196</sup> and drug addicts before their departure,<sup>197</sup> and explaining that members of the Salafist Jihadist community and VEOs target vulnerable individuals, such as drug addicts and alcoholics, to convert and recruit them.<sup>198</sup>

*"Some people are more prone to evil than others and some people are more prone to drugs than others. You can see that some of the people who went to Syria and came back here, they use drugs. One of the guys we know came back and started selling drugs in Al Sariyeh [in Irbid]. He opened his own coffee shop here so we came to his place and beat him up and we stopped him from doing business because we don't want other people to do the same as him. We wanted to give people an example that we won't allow that here because he is a black hole for drugs and for promoting radical thoughts and supporting ISIS." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

### The availability of weapons has been a growing concern since the start of the war in Syria.

Weapons have become increasingly widespread over the past years, as locals are increasingly concerned about the Syrian conflict and that ISIS might pose a direct threat to Jordan, in particular following the government announcement of the discovery of ISIS sleeper cells in Irbid in March 2016. As a result, some locals have obtained firearms to protect themselves in case the security situation in Jordan seriously deteriorates. Accordingly, 81 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the availability of weapons is a problem in their community, while only 17 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 38). Notably, weapons



Most of those who take drugs hang around the areas close to Salt Market, such as Al Manshieh, Al Safeh, Al Khandak and Baqa'a refugee camp." (Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)

<sup>196</sup> "They are addicted to alcohol. From the beginning troublemakers are addicted to alcohol and to have them become religious is very fishy." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>197</sup> "[Those who join VEOs do so] for personal experiences. For instance, they go through something, an experience, such as a failure, a shock, a friend dying. I know about youths that used to go drink alcohol at the cemetery and they joined jihad. Actually, most of the people I heard about weren't committed religiously." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>198</sup> "Other areas which are at risk is Salt, not for extremism, what is concerning are drugs. Those that do not have the purchasing power for drugs, will find other ways, so it is easy to spread this, and to join the non-believer groups, and they have the ability to change the addict into the extremist, and I heard about many people who would get drunk, etc. and they are extremists. Drugs have become widespread in Jordan, unfortunately even though there are many efforts to combat it. We used to say that we were a zone where drugs pass, now we can say that we are a central location, now it is being grown, and produced in Jordan. Those that cannot obtain drugs, will use other ways to find it." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

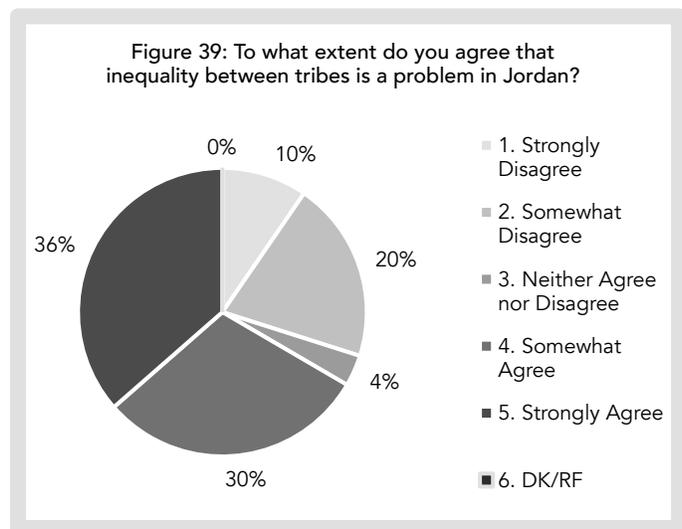
remain the most prevalent among members of tribes in Salt, including students,<sup>199</sup> and gang members, rather than among Islamists or other segments of the population.<sup>200</sup>

*“People in the last years started to obtain weapons because they are scared about what is going on in the region and the war in Syria is very close to them and especially after ISIS has threatened to attack Jordan, they started to obtain weapons in their houses so that in case anything happened they could defend themselves. They are mainly scared about the future.”*

*(Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)*

### Tribal inequality, especially in national and local politics, is viewed as a serious problem.

Inequality between tribes is a serious concern among locals, in particular as a result of the favorable political connections held by some tribes. The number of parliamentary seats allotted to members of a particular tribe is determined on the basis of tribal size, as a result of which the Hiyari tribe, for instance, holds two out of the five seats in Parliament. As a result, members of smaller and less influential tribes feel that they have a far lower chance of being appointed to important government positions.<sup>201</sup> Tribal connections also mean that some locals, specifically those from large and influential tribes, such as the Hiyari, benefit from greater leniency in the face of a society generally restricted by traditional, religious, and cultural norms.<sup>202</sup> Accordingly, 66 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that inequality between tribes is a problem in Jordan, while 30 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 39). While this is a considerable source of grievance, as in other parts of the country, open conflict between tribes has mainly been witnessed at



<sup>199</sup> “We have arms in Salt. The tribes of Slat are all armed, as this is tradition in Jordan. However does anyone support the violent extremists with arms? No, of course not. I don’t know of anyone providing the people of Salt with arms. We can see what happened in Irbid when the group got their arms. It is obvious that the state wouldn’t stand silently while the extremists act.” (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>200</sup> “I have only seen armed gangs and university students but I have never seen armed Islamists in Salt.” (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>201</sup> “People think that there is inequality between tribes because in the parliamentary elections the tribe numbers control the seat numbers. For example, the Hiyari family has two out of five seats in the Parliament because the tribe has the most members. Some tribes who are not powerful tribes have a very weak chance of obtaining any higher official positions.” (Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)

<sup>202</sup> “I know that people will not attack my project. I come from the Hiyari tribe, a big tribe in Salt. They wouldn’t accept this from someone who is not originally from Salt. I have my way of working in Salt.” (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

universities, such as open conflict at Balqa Applied University in October 2013 between tribes from Ira and Yarqa and Salt and another incident in April 2015.

*"At Balqa Applied University there was a massacre two years ago. There were a lot of weapons and there was shooting. One of my relatives who was not involved in the fight was shot and killed and they don't know who killed him. The fight was between two different tribes from two different districts. A tribe from Ira and Yaqa and another tribe from Salt. No one knows exactly what was going on but it seems that at the university there is a place where people from Salt sit and a separate place where the members of the other tribe sit and Salt guys sat on the spot of the other guys."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

**While the tribal system in Balqa largely constitutes a barrier to both religious and violent extremism, radical individuals and VEOs could harness tribal dynamics such as tribal solidarity and social networks.**

Tribes in Balqa generally lean toward religious moderation and are dismissive of radical individuals, as the latter are not representative of the mainstream and therefore stand apart from the crowd. This is also reflected in the fact that some tribes have appeared eager to cover up the involvement of their members in VEOs until their death, for instance by explaining that tribal members who are likely to have left for Syria are merely working abroad.<sup>203</sup> While religious and violent extremism are growing concerns in Balqa, the strong tribal system has obstructed the influence of VEOs,<sup>204</sup> and tribal leaders in particular have played an important role in countering religious and violent extremism. In a notable incident that occurred in 2013, religious extremists killed an individual who had reportedly cursed Islam, to which local tribes responded by burning down the homes of religious leaders involved and handed them over to the authorities.<sup>205</sup>

Nevertheless, tribes have also demonstrated their willingness to stand by tribal members who have joined VEOs in Syria, in particular those killed in fighting, suggesting that tribal pride and familial ties outweigh tribal opposition to radicalism.<sup>206</sup> For instance, while members of a tribe might have qualms about the

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<sup>203</sup> "If a certain person from a certain tribe disappears, they may say that he travelled somewhere to work. They don't say that they went to Iraq or Syria to fight, until they know that this person died, which is when they feel they have to say that this person left for jihad. Then they call him a martyr and celebrate his death as a martyr." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>204</sup> "The only clashes that occurred were at the University of Jordan and what happened in Irbid. Salt is a society that is highly based on kinship, and so the presence of these groups is limited." (Male, 54, MP, Zarqa)

<sup>205</sup> "I heard that in 2013, someone cursed religion. This was in Ain Al Basha, an extremist group had a meeting, they heard that someone cursed Islam, they decided to defend religion, and so they went and punished him and killed him. But they were all captured the next day. His tribe interfered. They burned the houses of the religious leaders and then the state took over and arrested them." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>206</sup> "Tribes still accept [people who have gone to fight abroad]. Radical people convince others that this is who they are and they won't change, that they are Jihadist preachers. I remember I saw such groups two weeks ago in Salt; they still speak and wear the same things. Tribes accept them and they can't get rid of them because they are relatives. They accept them. They are relatives by blood." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

participation of their members in fighting in Syria, many would pay their respects at martyrdom celebrations regardless.<sup>207</sup> In this regard, tribalism does also have the potential to foster an enabling environment for radicalism, for instance because tribal solidarity and familial ties make it more difficult to voice criticism of those who have left Balqa to join VEOs, which suggests that tribal dynamics can be exploited by radical individuals and potentially by VEOs,<sup>208</sup> not least because recruitment into VEOs can also occur through social networks that are defined by tribal connections.<sup>209</sup> Crucially, the local tribal ties that obstruct the expression of, and participation in, VE locally do not extend to other governorates, which also helps to explain why many of those who participated in Salafist Jihadist protests in Zarqa in 2011 were from Salt, most notably the religious leader Jarrah Rahahleh.<sup>210</sup> In other words, Salafist Jihadists who might face social exclusion and even violent responses from their local tribes and communities in Salt do not face the same barriers to expressing religious extremist views in other parts of the country.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi also highlighted ties between Salafist Jihadists in Zarqa and Salt when he stated that Salt is the city of martyrs,<sup>212</sup> a title which referred to the number of locals who left Salt to fight in Iraq after 2003.<sup>213</sup>

*"We always have pride in our country and its tribes and families and kinship, when one of them becomes extreme, people will look at them negatively, it is like they are no longer accepted, between the family and tribe, and you find that they are not accepted by society, but for example if it's a person who is not the son of a tribe, it's okay and nobody asks or cares, they can do what they*

<sup>207</sup> "Tribes welcome this all together and they go to mourning houses as a tribe and join in the celebration. Maybe deep down inside they don't believe in it but they have to act like they accept it but inside they feel bad for what happened." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>208</sup> "We had a condolence ceremony held in Salt for someone that died fighting with ISIS. There wasn't a reaction, it is very sensitive in Salt, because of its tribal nature." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>209</sup> "From Salt, two of my relatives went to fight in Syria, from the same tribe, the Hiyari tribe. They were studying in Australia, they were committed religiously, they came to Salt to see their parents and a while later they joined ISIS. They were born and bred in Salt. It is a very serious and dangerous issue... From my tribe, there are Islamic figures. For instance, Bilal Hiyari was one of the founders of the Salafist movement in Jordan." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>210</sup> "In 2011, most of the people that went to the Zarqa protests were from Salt. They had many meetings in Salt. The request of the Zarqa protests was the establishment of the Islamic state, as Islam is the solution. Many of them were from Salt. Remember the one that was holding the sword for instance, that was Jarrah Rahahleh. He is from Salt and he is still here, he goes to the cafes and sits with people. I think he hasn't been present for the past couple of days, the last 48 hours." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>211</sup> "[The Salafist Jihadists] have not organized violent events in Salt [like they did in Zarqa for instance]. They are worried the Salt community wouldn't accept them as a political extremist group. Salt has its tribal traditions. At the end of the day, these people come from Salt tribes. If they thought about attacking someone because of religion, people would stand against them. They had peaceful events. They work and open their businesses and the community accepts them as long as they don't resort to violence. For example, the one from the Khreisat tribe would go to buy from someone from the same tribe because the blood relations are stronger than anything." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>212</sup> "In addition to Salt, there's Zarqa city, since Musab Al Zarqawi, may God never forgive him, said that Salt is the city of martyrs. So this caused a huge problem in Salt." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

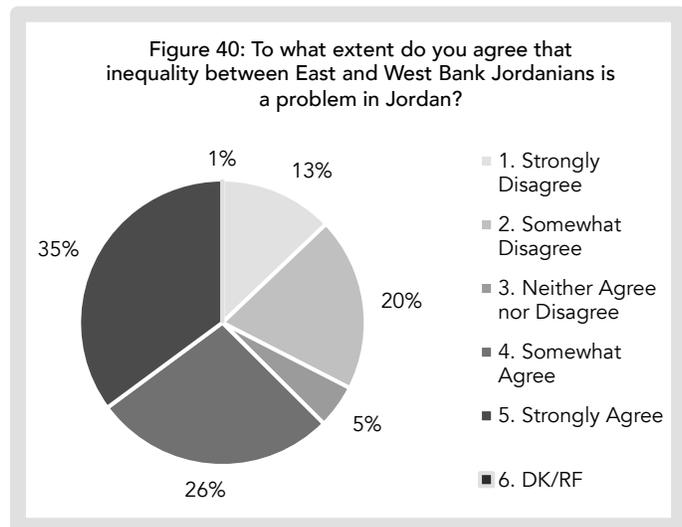
<sup>213</sup> Martin Patience 2006. 'City of martyrs salutes Zarqawi', BBC News, June 09, 2006.

want. Here you find that the son and brother, and the uncle and the cousins, would put pressure on them, so in my view tribes can be positive, but I do hope that kinship does not make extremists as well. I like my tribe, but I am not an extremist. For example, in my tribe, any person who crosses a line is no longer liked. We do have men that went to fight in Syria but of course we did not know about them. They did not become extremists here and then go. We knew them as moderates and suddenly they went to fight but if they lived among us, they would be hated. That is how I see it.”

(Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

Inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is widely viewed as constituting a problem in Jordan but views as to whether East or West Bank Jordanians are more prone to VE are mixed.

Most respondents reported that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a serious problem in Jordan and 61 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem in Jordan, while 33 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 40). In particular, some national politicians, notably MP Tareq Khouri, who is also the president of the Palestinian soccer team Al Wehdat FC, are blamed for fueling tensions between East and West Bank Jordanians.<sup>214</sup> However, there was less agreement as to whether heritage impacts propensity toward VE and/or recruitment into VEOs. On the one hand, locals from Palestinian refugee camps, such as Baqa’a refugee camp, are viewed as especially vulnerable to recruitment into VEOs.<sup>215</sup> This is mainly the case due to the perceived political marginalization of refugee camps, as a result of which many youths do not feel that they belong to Jordanian society, often despite holding Jordanian citizenship, and local socio-economic conditions, such as poor living conditions and widespread poverty. In contrast, some other respondents identified East Bank Jordanian youths as especially at risk of VE and recruitment into VEOs, for instance in parts of Salt such as Salt Qasabah, and Salalem, highlighting that this is the case



<sup>214</sup> “Tareq Khouri’s speeches that increase the hostility between Al Faisali and Al Wehdat fans are hate speech.” (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>215</sup> “Now if we want to talk about other issues or environments in Jordan that pose a risk, as far as I am informed, it’s the refugee camps from which individuals have gone to participate, specifically the refugee camps that have Palestinian refugees, although they do not have extremist groups, but still a number of them joined.” (Female, 38, Lawyer, Amman)

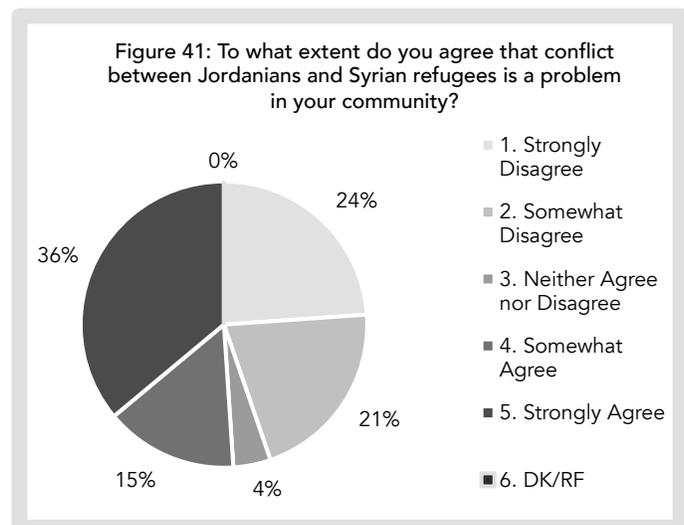
because VEO narratives, such as the implementation of Sharia law and a greater role of Islamic law in governance, resonate strongly with East Bank Jordanian (tribal) youths.<sup>216</sup>

*“They feel like they don’t belong, they feel like they are being marginalized. Especially those living in a camp, although they may have a Jordanian ID, they still don’t feel that they are being treated as Jordanian. They are from Palestinian origins. There is poverty, bad living conditions, and many other negative factors, so they feel like they need to belong, to be part of society, to feel power.”*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

**Syrian refugees are blamed for putting great pressure on access to government services and employment but views as to whether conflict with Syrian refugees is a problem are mixed.**

Syrian refugees, of which there were estimated to be 19,963 in Balqa in February 2016,<sup>217</sup> are increasingly viewed as putting severe pressure on government services, most notably healthcare and education, pushing up high and rising prices, such as housing costs, and competing with locals for limited jobs, which has the potential to fuel resentment toward Syrian refugees, but also contribute to grievances toward the government. In fact, most blame the government for perceived problems with the integration of Syrian refugees, for instance because their status as refugees constitutes a barrier to their integration and the utilization of their skills, alleging that the government does not want to integrate refugees because it uses



them to obtain aid from international donors. Additionally, the inflammatory speeches of some national politicians, such as those of the former Foreign Minister Marwan Al Muasher, have been interpreted as critical of to the benefits that Syrian refugees receive, and have therefore contributed to worsening relations between locals and Syrian refugees.<sup>218</sup> Among other issues, Muasher highlighted the pressure that Syrian refugees are putting on access to jobs, water resources, the national budget, and the

<sup>216</sup> “In Balqa it is mainly the Eastern Jordanians who are at risk of VE. Specifically, in the Salt Qasabah and Salalem areas of the city, they are mainly from the middle class, and the youths of tribes. First, they start preaching to them to follow the laws of Sharia and Islam and then they would encourage them to join terrorist groups.” (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>217</sup> UNHCR 2016. ‘Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal’, UNHCR, February 17, 2016.

<sup>218</sup> “Marwan Al Muasher’s political speech when he said refugees get this and Jordanians get this is actually a hate speech since he tried to separate two major components of Jordanian society.” (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

economy.<sup>219</sup> However, views as to whether conflict between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem in Balqa were mixed; 51 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that conflict between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem in their community, while 45 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 41).

*"The Jordanian government is using [the Syrian refugees] to justify a lot of things that are going on in Jordan. They are taking water, power, energy, job opportunities, and school places. There is a heavy burden on the state but we can use this in a positive way. The population increase in Jordan is a good thing. The Syrians have a lot of money and skills. However, Jordan has not given them a chance to contribute to the economy. They were given refugee IDs immediately, so they are a resource that has not been taken advantage of. It is in the interest of the state to take donor aid and to keep them in a position as refugees rather than to help them to integrate."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

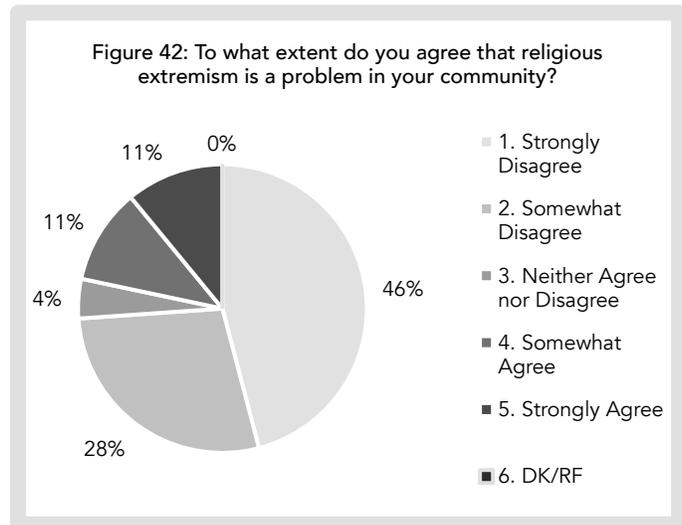
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<sup>219</sup> Karen Leigh 2014. 'Q&A: Marwan Muasher on Syria's Impact on Jordan', News Deeply, February 21, 2014.

#### 4.4 EXPOSURE TO VE AND PERCEPTIONS OF VEO THREAT

##### Most locals dismiss claims that religious extremism constitutes a problem in Balqa.

While some respondents confirmed that radical religious groups that promote VEO narratives and recruitment into VEOs operate in Balqa,<sup>220</sup> religious leaders are generally well-respected and viewed as role models regardless of their radical views.<sup>221</sup> Similarly, many locals do not perceive Salafist Jihadists as extreme, but rather as a religious community first and foremost, that is mainly involved in politics when it comes to advocating for better conditions on behalf of imprisoned Salafist Jihadists. Accordingly, 74 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed that religious extremism is a problem in their community, while 22 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed (see Figure 42). Notably, there is some concern that government oppression of the Salafist Jihadist community might backfire and make some of its members more extreme, which suggests that some locals reject government pressure that is perceived to be targeting the Salafist Jihadist community.<sup>222</sup>



While most respondents rejected the view that religious extremism is a concern in Balqa, some maintained that religious extremism is nevertheless a growing concern and that Balqa is becoming an increasingly narrow minded and closed environment,<sup>223</sup> in which a fear of upsetting religiously extreme persons can diminish freedom of expression,<sup>224</sup> and religious pressure has been growing. For instance, religious leaders reportedly make house visits and patrol the streets, such as in Al Salalem in Salt district, to encourage youths to attend prayer times, using religious rhetoric such as the lure of heaven and threats

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<sup>220</sup> “We do have [VE] groups [in Baqa’a refugee camp], some Salafist Jihadist leaders as well. We also have younger people who have joined the groups and who are learning from the leaders in the camp.” (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>221</sup> “As soon as you have a beard and you are wearing robes, then you are a sheikh and this is a respected person who is polite and soft spoken and a religious person.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>222</sup> “Salafist Jihadist protests are focused on obtaining better conditions for their members. However, the police are now targeting them because they are an illegal group in Jordan. They are facing oppression and this has the potential to make them more radical but other times they just want to avoid trouble and follow their religion. People don’t see them as violent extremists. People see them as religious groups.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>223</sup> “There is a seed of a serious problem with violent extremism in my community. Salt is historically known for being an open city. My mother was a feminist in Salt; she was a school principle. Salt was more liberal; there was more tolerance for Christians. Even the understanding of Islam was broader, now it is very narrow minded and closed.” (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>224</sup> “Violent extremism is becoming more of a problem in my community. It is not just about the direct violent acts we see, it is about the diminishing freedoms like freedom of expression and speech. People would rather stay quiet, and not speak, so as not to upset the Islamic people.” (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

of divine punishment to put pressure on youths.<sup>225</sup> In fact, tensions between religious extremists and atheists have in the past even escalated into violence. One respondent reported witnessing attacks by religious extremists on individuals in 2013, 2014, and 2015. In one incident in 2013, a man was reportedly shot on his doorstep by religious extremists for openly dismissing religion. The respondent also noted that the presence of the security forces was limited and that the security forces were ineffectual in preventing the 2013 shooting.<sup>226</sup>

*"There is a family in Salt that has young kids. They started growing their beards, they started calling on people to pray, they stopped accepting others, they posted provocative messages on social media, and they started supporting ISIS. This phenomena was noticed before, and disappeared, then reappeared, and is now increasing."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

**While most locals maintain that religious and violent extremism are limited phenomena, many believe that both are on the rise.**

While most respondents emphasized that religious and violent extremism are limited phenomena that exist among a small community of locals,<sup>227</sup> they reported that both are on the rise,<sup>228</sup> as demonstrated by the fact that news of locals joining VEOs is shared as frequently as every couple of months,<sup>229</sup> and that security patrols and checks, especially of public buses, have been stepped up since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. In particular, respondents attributed the rise in VE in Balqa to a number of factors, including a history of radicalization in the governorate,<sup>230</sup> since locals left to fight in Afghanistan in the

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<sup>225</sup> "The sheikhs are going around to houses, they would see youths standing in the street to pray, and would encourage them to come attend religious sessions. They use an encouraging approach; they promote Islam. However they speak about hell and the punishment of those that don't follow Islam. For instance, in the Al Salalem area in Salt, I was standing with a group of youths when a preacher came to us to tell us to join prayer. We told him that we are waiting for a friend and we will follow. He said he would stay with us, and started telling us about heaven and hell, and started preaching. This was a year, a year and a half ago, around the end of 2014. When we told them we were in a hurry, they went away. I was shocked when this happened, as it was a first, however the youths that were with me weren't surprised, as this is a recurring event." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>226</sup> "I observed a decreasing presence of the state and security forces. There are clashes between Islamic groups and the rejects, or those that left Islam. I saw two or three incidents; in 2014 one incident and 2015 I saw two such incidents. The Islamic groups think they are the reference, to punish those that reject Islam or renounce it. They use white arms and in 2013, someone was shot for cursing religion. He was killed on his own doorstep. The security forces interfered at a much later stage and they didn't do anything until then." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>227</sup> "In Salt, we have 419,000 citizens. Extremism is present but among very few people here. We can't talk about it like it's a huge problem." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>228</sup> "The ideological extremism is definitely increasing in my community. There is more than one type of extremism: violent armed extremism, terrorist extremism, and ideological extremism." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>229</sup> "The problem of VE in Salt is getting worse. Every couple of months we hear about a new person joining ISIS." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>230</sup> "I can say that extremism is now increasing and it is a result of the heritage that was left by individuals with radical ideology." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

1990's,<sup>231</sup> and more recently, around 2012, also left to fight in Iraq.<sup>232</sup> Some respondents identified areas across the governorate as especially vulnerable to VE, including the districts of Fuhais & Mahes, Ain Al Basha, Baqa'a,<sup>233</sup> and Salt Qasabah.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, in Salt, respondents identified areas including Aleayzaria, Qsam, Aalbaqie, Mansheyeh,<sup>235</sup> Al Jada'a, and Al Ezareyye as especially vulnerable.<sup>236</sup> However, despite growing concerns, it is notable that the vast majority (93 percent) of respondents reported that they or their family members had not directly suffered from crime (see Figure 43).

*"Now we have two permanent patrol cars in the area for security reasons. I don't think the state would station these two police cars in the area without good security motives. These police cars check IDs in general; they mainly focus on public buses. I believe that the security campaign is targeting those that are wanted by the state. However following the events in Syria, they now stop buses and let all passengers out for a security check, this I feel is to monitor extremism."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

Figure 43: Have you or your family directly suffered from VE?



<sup>231</sup> "I personally used to know a guy [in the 1990's] who was very educated, polite and very well mannered. He was in the University of Jordan. And then suddenly, there was a complete change in his religious beliefs. He became convinced that he lives in an evil world and that everything around him is wrong and that he has to go fight and be a jihadist in Afghanistan... After two years he died in Afghanistan." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>232</sup> "I remember a story of a guy who was my age, his family used to be annoyed by his behavior. He then suddenly became a Salafist Jihadist and disappeared. His family later knew that he had left to Iraq and died there, he was close to Al Zarqawi. This happened four years ago." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>233</sup> "Violent extremism is a problem. Al Muthalath, Fuhais & Mahes, Ain Al Basha and Al Baqa'a are areas where there is a problem with violent extremism in particular." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>234</sup> "The ones I know who left to fight in Syria are from Al Qasabah." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>235</sup> "In Salt, the people who joined the groups are from different areas, like Aleayzaria, Qsam, Aalbaqie, and one from Mansheyeh." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>236</sup> "Al Jada'a, Al Ezareyye, close to the Midan, in the middle of the city, are areas in my community that are at risk of VE." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

Martyrdom celebrations demonstrate that there is some support for locals who left Balqa to join VEOs in Syria, although some locals maintain that they are more reflective of communal solidarity.

Many respondents reported that the parents of Jordanians who have died in Syria mostly express pride at martyrdom celebrations held soon after the deaths of fighters, arranging martyrdom celebrations, calling deceased fighters martyrs, and making banners in their honor.<sup>237</sup> Martyrdom celebrations for fighters who died in Syria, to which thousands of people have reportedly come to pay their condolences in some instances, have been held in Balqa. In addition, condolences are often expressed over social media websites, most notably Facebook, on which relatives celebrate those who were killed fighting as martyrs. Some respondents interpreted the high attendance numbers as confirming that there is support for locals who have gone to join VEOs, although some might otherwise be scared of publicly voicing their support.<sup>238</sup> However, in some instances families also hid the news that their family members died fighting with VEOs in Syria, most likely out of shame or fear of the government.<sup>239</sup> Some other respondents also maintained that martyrdom celebrations should not be equated with support for VEOs, as indicated by the fact that the views of attendees might be drastically different just a week later,<sup>240</sup> and because, even though they might not have supported the VEOs for which their family members fought prior to their deaths, they feel a sense of solidarity after their death and therefore a duty to defend their actions.<sup>241</sup> While some respondents raised concerns that the government is not doing enough to crack down on public martyrdom celebrations, both on the ground and on social media,<sup>242</sup> for instance highlighting that

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<sup>237</sup> "Parents mostly feel proud of their son who dies in the fight in Syria. In general they take care of everything when their son dies and they make the preparations for the mourning house and they call him a martyr and they write banners." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>238</sup> "We have people that are supportive of Jordanians' recruitment and joining of these groups that express their support. Some other groups are supportive silently; I call these groups tolerant environments. They are silent because they are scared of publicly announcing their support. I have seen martyrdom celebrations for Jordanian fighters in Salt for example with thousands of people coming to pay condolences." (Male, 43, Journalist, Amman)

<sup>239</sup> "Only one family didn't accept the news and they hid the news of his death... Maybe that's why the last family hid the news of their son's death because maybe they also were afraid of the government." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>240</sup> "When Jihad [Ghaban] died, you heard that women were happy saying he is a martyr. However, there is a difference if you ask people at the condolences or one week later... The Salafist Jihadists are the main attendees of the condolence; they established their presence at the condolence." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>241</sup> "There is a story that was told to me about one person who got a call that his brother died [in Syria]. The guy on the phone told him not to call the man who died a martyr, and said that he is nothing. The people related to the man who died felt bad and they didn't like that he said that about their son. After he finished the phone call he knew that he is not a martyr. I don't see any use of going there... most people are against it but they can't say anything. Some people declare that they are with those radical groups." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>242</sup> "I actually feel there is support for the people joining the jihadi groups among family members because of the martyrdom celebrations they are holding. Some people are going to the martyrdom celebrations, some post on Facebook, that those killed are martyrs, and the government is not doing anything to fight this." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

the number of martyrdom celebrations held in Balqa has not declined,<sup>243</sup> martyrdom celebrations have become increasingly closed events, when compared to the past,<sup>244</sup> mainly as a result of government monitoring, as locals are afraid of being interrogated by the government after attending such events.

*"I don't think that close family members could look at those that joined the fight and died as if they had died in vain. It's difficult for families to acknowledge this, psychologically... [Mahmoud's family] still feel a great loss for his departure and are very sad... [His] family, who received Al Tahawi at their home, when Mahmoud their son died, after a week of hospitality, they thought: why is this sheikh sending our children and not his own. A while after he died, when they felt the financial burden of his family and kids, they could feel it is very wrong that Mahmoud decided to join the fight and die. Things get very complicated and they then feel differently about the people that joined."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

### **While many locals maintain that most parents are not supportive of their children joining VEOs in Syria, family networks and environments can enable recruitment into VEOs.**

Some respondents maintained that most local parents would at least attempt to constitute a barrier to the recruitment of their children into VEOs, highlighting that some family members took concrete steps to discourage their family members from joining VEOs in Syria, although they are often uninformed of the intentions of their family members to join VEOs before their arrival in Syria,<sup>245</sup> or to retrieve those who had already left.<sup>246</sup> However, even parents who were not supportive of their family members leaving Jordan to join VEOs prior to their departure, would likely celebrate them as martyrs upon their death, which indicates that the death of a family members who joined a VEO often involves a shift in attitude toward VEOs,<sup>247</sup> and that families can function as enabling environments, for instance by expressing support for

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<sup>243</sup> "Those who I know and who died in Syria, they are celebrated at martyrdom celebrations. The government should not allow that. They have not gotten less. Anyone who is killed fighting is celebrated as a martyr." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>244</sup> "There was an incident where someone bombed a condolence ceremony in Iraq killing 70 people, after that a condolence ceremony was held here in Salt. It was called a congratulation acceptance event. The Iraqi embassy condemned accepting congratulations for this. Usually it was done publicly, however now it is done in secret. Those interested go to these events, the state is monitoring this, and people tend to avoid going to give condolences. People could be interrogated following going to condolences." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>245</sup> "Of course, when a 17 year old decides to pick up to leave to Syria and join jihad in Aleppo there is a connection with the groups. A while back, a youth told his family he's going to Aqaba, and then he called to tell them he is in Aleppo." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>246</sup> "My relatives who joined ISIS returned because their father brought them back. He went to Syria to retrieve them. He went to Syria via Turkey and paid a lot of money to smuggle himself into Syria and get them back. The father does not like speaking about this with people who are not family members because he assumes that they are working for the security services. However, I suspect that the security services might have helped to bring them back." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>247</sup> "Mostly [parents] support their sons who fight. They believe in their ideology. They are in a place where they want to defend their sons. Parents always feel with their sons. I saw that because I used to visit the families of the people who went. They used to defend their sons. Before going, these families won't support their sons to go there to fight. However, in the mourning houses you can see them agreeing with what their sons did." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

the actions of family members who joined VEOs and died fighting in Syria, most notably at martyrdom celebrations.<sup>248</sup> In fact, several respondents suggested that families function as social networks within which individuals become radicalized and recruited into VEOs, including members of prominent families such as the Abu Ruman,<sup>249</sup> Hiyari, and Arabiat families,<sup>250</sup> where members of the latter were reportedly also involved in the 2005 Amman bombings.<sup>251</sup> Some respondents also emphasized that these family networks threaten to foster a next generation of radicalized family members who view those who joined VEOs before them as martyrs.<sup>252</sup> The families of some of those who left Balqa to fight in Syria and Iraq have also formed their own community, which is supportive of the decisions made by their family members who have left, and can therefore act as an enabling environment for further recruitment into VEOs.<sup>253</sup> Notably, some locals highlighted the importance of family members as a first line of defense against radicalization and recruitment into VEOs, as they are best placed to report suspicious behavior to the authorities. However, perceived poor relations with the authorities, a lack of knowledge of how to best contact the authorities, and fear of the negative consequences their family members might face, such as incarceration and torture, currently obstruct effective cooperation.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> "In the beginning mostly people are in shock and denial when someone leaves to fight abroad. There are a percentage of families that accept this." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>249</sup> "In Al Salt someone from the family of Abu Ruman was recruiting people to join VEOs." (Male, 56, MP, Amman); "I know the brother of two people from Salt who joined JN and ISIS; he was my classmate and we spent our teenage years together. He was a lawyer and left that profession as it is haram and now he works in trade, however halal trading... we spent our years together, he wasn't religious at all. He was regular like us in 2009. When I saw him in 2012 he looked like a Salafist. He was dressed in the Afghani attire. He still had his sense of humor... I believe the change was on the family level [within the Abu Ruman family]. I communicated with this family a lot from 1996 to 2001, and I never noticed any of these issues, they were a regular Jordanian family, not extremist and not too religious. It was very sudden. I started hearing that Ziyad, the eldest brother, started to get radically religious and I saw him with my own eyes, he radically changed his way of dressing and carrying himself, and he grew a beard as well. Then I heard that Hamza, the one that Joined ISIS, had reached a high position in ISIS to lead Homs. Then I heard that he died in direct fighting with the Syrian Regime. He died in 2015." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>250</sup> "I know of a guy from the Arabiat family, his brother went there, then they told him to kill a person but he killed the wrong guy, so they executed him. They also get them wives." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>251</sup> "People in Salt have relations with Iraqis; actually one resident from Salt was the one who protected Sashida, the Iraqi terrorist. She was married to someone from Salt, or her sister, someone from the Arabiat family." (Male, 49, Lawyer, Amman)

<sup>252</sup> "We had two or three people that joined ISIS, from the Abu Ruman family from Salt. We are all living together. They reside in Salt not Im Jozeh. It is a serious problem because one of them died, he has a family, brothers, and his kids and nephews and nieces will be brought up thinking that they have a martyr in the family. This person's family considers him to be a martyr that died defending Islam. This could create a new generation that's violent and extremist." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>253</sup> "The families of those who joined jihad have made a community inside our community, they communicate and visit each other, which could help in recruitment as well... There is now a community of the families that have sons fighting in Syria. People feel they are wrong and the families think that the society is wrong." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>254</sup> "Families who suffered radicalization most probably feared communicating with the authorities but I continue to advise a lot of parents to seek professional help for their children. For instance, I sought help for few friends myself as a favor; otherwise, their kids might have end up in Syria overnight for good. I believe the main reason people fear the

*"There's a well-known family in Salt, where the youths drink and smoke and live normally, then at one point the youth became more religious and committed and extreme. I know many of them are fighting in Syria. I don't know how many people, but a good amount of them are fighting with ISIS I heard. We have the seed of belief as a society, and many go back to this ideology at one point, maybe at a time of weakness. In Salt, people accept that this family is like this. People deal with them in the same way."*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

authorities is lack of knowledge basically because they don't really understand its role and how the contact procedure goes in such cases. In my opinion, any person who has signs of extremism and terrorism should be reported to concerned authorities and state apparatuses, which are qualified to investigate according to evidence, not by torture." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

## 5.0 EXTERNAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

### 5.1 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Views toward the US are mixed, with locals critical toward US foreign policy but welcoming US aid.**

Most respondents were clear in their opposition to US foreign policy, especially the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and many agreed that US foreign policy contributed to radicalization in Balqa, reporting that radicalization in Balqa noticeably increased in the aftermath of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars,<sup>255</sup> citing as evidence that many locals went to fight in both countries, including individuals from the prominent Arabiat and Abu Ruman tribes,<sup>256</sup> and accusing the US of contributing to radicalization by fueling sectarian tensions in the region.<sup>257</sup> In particular, opposition to US interventions in the region and in Jordan was reported to be high among Ba'athists and Nationalists in Balqa.<sup>258</sup> Crucially, VEOs have become adept at harnessing narratives on the damaging effects of US interventionism in the region in their recruitment activities, for instance by specifically targeting the male family members of individuals allegedly killed in US attacks over social media websites.<sup>259</sup>

However, views as to whether the US has a positive or negative impact on Jordan were mixed among respondents; 52 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that the US has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while 44 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact (see Figure 47 below). Despite strong opposition to US foreign policy, there is substantial support for US financial aid to Jordan, in particular for USAID projects that support community-based organizations. In addition, there is also respect for the US as a role model in terms of its economic and political strength,

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<sup>255</sup> "When things were normal in Iraq and Syria, there was no radicalism. Let us talk about Iraq when Baghdad fell, when the US was in the country. We didn't feel there was jihadism and radicalism. It was more of a nationalistic spirit. What happened recently in Iraq and Syria affected my community." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>256</sup> "In Salt there is a huge presence for the Afghani, Salafist Jihadists. Many people from Salt died fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq following September 11th. Many youths went to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many people went to fight and died. One example would be Nidal Arabiat, the husband of Sashida A Rishawi and many more. From the Abu Ruman family many left as well and also other tribes." (Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)

<sup>257</sup> "The US is to blame for radicalization in Jordan through supporting sectarian governments. The US with their colonization and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>258</sup> "Some believe that the US has a positive effect on Jordan since they support Jordan with money and aid and they also support the refugees. This is when it comes to the human side but if they have a political point of view they think it has a negative effect in Jordan especially Ba'athists and Nationalists." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>259</sup> "VEOs outside of Jordan are trying to contact or call specific people. There is a case that I know of. A kid whose dad died in Iraq, they reached him using Facebook, they told him: your dad died in this place and the group who killed him are (he didn't mention the name) this group. They started telling the kid that a group who works with Americans or foreigners killed his dad. They created some sort of hate inside that kid toward America and Americans. They played with his mind and then started thinking of the best way to get him to Iraq or Syria. After that point in time, I stopped hearing about that kid. The person who was able to see that kid became busy and couldn't be able to reach or contact him." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

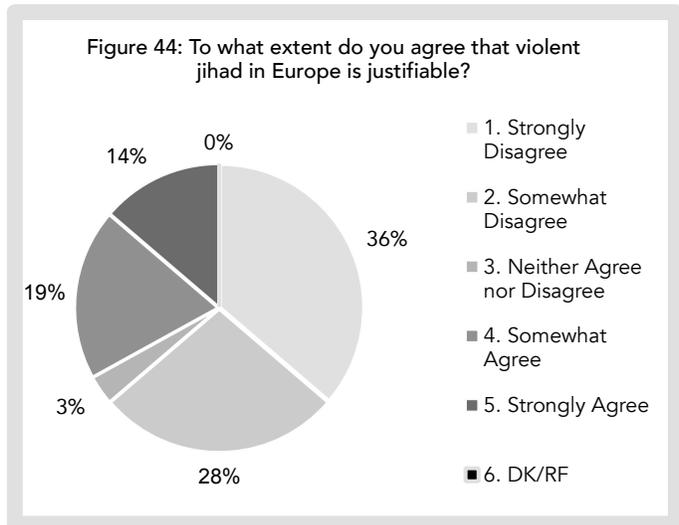
which contributes to its image as a country that has a positive impact on Jordan, in general, and as a well-placed donor country, in particular.<sup>260</sup>

*“Those who say that the US has a positive impact on Jordan refer to the financial aid that the US government gives to Jordan, and also the USAID projects in Jordan that support community centers, take care of forests, such as Zai forest, and other projects like funding some community based organizations in Jordan but I don’t feel like the majority believes that the US has a positive impact on Jordan.”*

*(Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)*

While views regarding the impact of the EU on Jordan are mixed, opposition to the foreign policies of some EU countries is strong, and some even view violent jihad as a legitimate response.

While locals welcome EU aid to Jordan, most are highly critical of the foreign policies of a number of European countries, mainly those of the United Kingdom (UK) and France, alleging that European countries are to blame for much of the political instability in the Middle East, for instance as a result of policies that are perceived as exploitative and aimed at seizing control of regional resources.<sup>261</sup> Views as to whether the EU has a positive or negative impact on Jordan were therefore mixed and 46 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that the EU has a ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ positive impact on Jordan, while 44 percent reported that it has a ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ negative impact (see Figure 47 below). As a consequence of strong opposition to EU foreign policies, and although most disagree, many locals believe that jihad against some European countries is justifiable, mainly because some of the terrorist attacks by VEOs in Europe are viewed as legitimate revenge for damaging policies of European governments in the Middle East, such as the perceived negative impact of



<sup>260</sup> “How people view the US politically is different from how they view the US financially. There is support for the US as a country that provides aid to Jordan. There is a perception that the US provides substantial support to Jordan financially. There is respect for the US as a strong and powerful country and it is a role model to Jordan in this way.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>261</sup> “They feel like the terrorism is a European and American industry and they spread it in the Muslim countries as a part of their campaigns to destroy Islam and Arabs. They believe that Western countries benefited from all of the ruin in the MENA region to get the chance to use our resources, in Iraq and Libya for the oil and in Syria for the natural gas.” (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

colonization, globalization, free trade, and revenge for support for Israel.<sup>262</sup> Additionally, many view as justifiable forms of lobbying European governments to cease interfering in the region, mainly the UK and French governments. Accordingly, while 64 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad in Europe is justifiable, as many as 33 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 44). More specifically, attacks against the UK, such as those that occurred in London in 2005, are viewed as justifiable as a result of UK involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as UK support for Israel.<sup>263</sup> The terrorist attacks against Charlie Hebdo in 2015 are also widely viewed as justifiable as a result of strong local opposition to the magazine's depiction of the Prophet and subsequent international support for the magazine, which reinforced the view that the West humiliates Islam.<sup>264</sup> In contrast, respondents condemned the attacks in Paris targeting restaurants and cafes in 2015 to the extent that some even suggested that the attacks were carried out by Western governments with the intention of tainting the image of Syrian refugees in Europe rather than by Jihadists. However, outrage at terrorist attacks in Belgium in 2016 was the greatest, as Belgium is viewed as having historically refrained from interfering in the Middle East and as supportive of Palestine, which highlights that locals distinguish some European countries and national targets as more legitimate than others and that such views are changeable in response to perceptions of EU foreign and domestic policies.<sup>265</sup>

*"The activities of VEOs in Europe are justifiable because this is a way to force the European governments to stop doing actions against the Middle East and to leave us alone or we will pay them back. We remain under occupation but the tools changed. In the past, colonization worked by sending troops and establishing bases, but now they are using multinational companies to control the resources and interfere in other countries. They should know that direct colonization and indirect interference is the same and they should burn in the same fire they turned on the Arab people. Any European country that supports the Palestinian cause should not be touched but jihad is justifiable in any European country that supports Israel. Jihad is also justifiable in a European country such as the UK that supported the Iraq invasion. Jihad against the US is definitely justifiable because they are the biggest supporter of Israel and also because they occupied Iraq and keep interfering in Arab and Muslims countries." (Male, 45, Marketing Manage, Balqa)*

<sup>262</sup> "The West allowed and facilitated and supported instability in the region for their own political interests and those operations might change public opinion in Europe and lobby their governments to stop interventions in Arab and Muslim areas because the revenge will come back later. The activities of VEOs in Europe are justifiable because this is a way to force the European governments to stop doing actions against the Middle East and to leave us alone or we will pay them back." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>263</sup> "The attacks in London in 2005 were justifiable since the British are the ones who helped give Palestine to the Jews." (Male, 45, Marketing Manage, Balqa)

<sup>264</sup> "The attacks against Charlie Hebdo were definitely justifiable since those drawings insulted our Prophet and the world did not move and viewed it as freedom of expression, when this is a freedom of insulting." (Male, 45, Marketing Manage, Balqa)

<sup>265</sup> "The attacks in Paris that targeted restaurants and civilians were not justifiable. I don't think Jihadists carried them out. It seems like that was a conspiracy to prevent France from hosting more refugees. The attacks in Brussels in 2016 were not justifiable at any level. Belgium never hurts us or supported or took part in any action in the MENA region. They are a big supporter of our causes and especially the Palestinian cause." (Male, 45, Marketing Manage, Balqa)

**Sectarianism has been on the rise, with many locals concerned over the perceived threat of Shia expansionism, and VEOs have capitalized on sectarian and anti-Iranian narratives.**

Most respondents reported that sectarianism has been on the rise, with some blaming media channels such as Al Jazeera,<sup>266</sup> and confirmed that VEOs have been successful in capitalizing on growing sectarian tensions in the region and also disseminated anti-Shia messages that resonate with locals. For instance, ISIS has repeatedly highlighted that fighting the Shias is a key priority, for instance claiming that Umar Ibn Al Khattab, the second caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, also prioritized fighting the Shias.<sup>267</sup> Some respondents also confirmed that VEOs have been successful in harnessing sectarian narratives, such as messages that Shias, Alawites, and Iran are against the Sunni community,<sup>268</sup> and pictures and videos showing Sunni men, women, and children being targeted by Shias to garner support,<sup>269</sup> and mobilize locals to join VEOs.<sup>270</sup> While there was widespread agreement among respondents that sectarianism is on the rise, and that the narratives that violent jihad against Shias is both justifiable and necessary are driving recruitment into VEOs, some highlighted that it has become increasingly difficult for VEOs to rally support for conflict between Muslims, especially since the murder of Kasasbeh by ISIS.<sup>271</sup> In contrast, mobilizing support for jihad against an occupying force, such as in the case of Afghanistan or Iraq, is viewed as easier, as a result of opposition to the justifiability of jihad against other Muslims.<sup>272</sup> In fact, 62 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable, while 34 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 45).

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<sup>266</sup> "Whenever you go and hear people talk in hair salons, when you want to cut your hair and listen to people talk, they speak about that. If you enter any place, any market, any salon, you see them following Al Jazeera constantly. It has become very apparent and clear, especially with Al Jazeera channel. Their message is very clear and it harmonizes with the agenda of Qatar, as it is Qatari news media and it follows their agenda." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>267</sup> "Fighting the Shias and the Alawites and getting rid of them in general is an effective message. Many people wondered why ISIS wouldn't go to fight Israel in Palestine. They say that Umar Ibn Al Khattab fought the Shias first, the rejects, and then he fought his enemies, and so they are following the sa'abah, Salaf Al Saleh, the friends of the Prophet Muhammad." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>268</sup> "Messages include that the Alawites are against us, the Shias and Iran are against us, and that the US is against Sunni Muslims." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>269</sup> "The persecution of people belonging to the same religious sect and having the same identity [is what makes people agree with VEOs]. For example, when you hear that Sunnis in a country were being burned and ISIS helped them, such stories make people want to support ISIS." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>270</sup> "Showing pictures of killed or raped Sunni men and women, that creates a sort of speech in Jordan like 'I want to burn all Shias' or 'I don't want to do business with Shias', knowing that those Shias completed all the paper work to be investors in Jordan. Jordanians hate Shias more now." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>271</sup> "In Syria, considering the conflict is between Arabs on both sides [calling this jihad] becomes more problematic. Against the US occupation of Iraq, or Afghanistan, whoever joined the fight was a hero and was going to do jihad, but in Syria now or in Iraq now and following Moath Kasasbeh, it is looked at differently." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>272</sup> "During the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, people actually supported joining the Islamic groups to join jihad, however since Syria and Iraq started, and considering that both sides of the conflict are Arab, and Muslim, and this war is aiming to segregate Syria, we don't have an agreement or acceptance in general in society." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

To a large degree opposition to Shias also stems from fears of perceived negative and growing Iranian influence in the region, as a result of which some in fact differentiated between Iranian and Arab Shias, voicing objections to jihad against other Arabs, while explaining that jihad against Iran is intended to curb non-Arab influence in the region.<sup>273</sup> There is widespread agreement that the foreign policies of Iran are aimed at increasing Shia influence and some locals point toward political events in Iraq as a warning. Some respondents were even supportive of restrictions on Iranian tourists entering Jordan to visit Shia shrines, interpreting such visits as missionary activities aimed at converting Sunnis.<sup>274</sup> In fact, 63 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that Iran has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only 14 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact (see Figure 47 below). The perceived negative influence of Iran in the region is also reinforced by a general sentiment that Iran, Hezbollah, and other Shia groups target Sunni Muslims,<sup>275</sup> which has escalated into narratives that Shia groups will come to Jordan next and target Sunni Muslims within the country.<sup>276</sup>

VEOs have also been successful in harnessing anti-Iranian sentiment and ISIS in particular is viewed by many as the only viable means of countering Shia influence in the Middle East, with some going to far as to frame Sunni-Shia tensions in the region as a conflict between ISIS and Iran, in the context of which ISIS is also supported by some as the lesser of two evils.<sup>277</sup> Additionally, opposition to Iran also stems from the perceived negative impact of Iranian intervention in Syria on Jordan. 54 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Iranian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan, while 43 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 46).

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<sup>273</sup> "I would be convinced if we were talking about Shias from Iran, then I would get it, because they wouldn't want someone to lead the Middle East that is not Arab, but they are against Shias in general, even the Arab Shias." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>274</sup> "People no longer talk about whether Iran is right or wrong, Jordanians and others are influenced by this, but Jordanians more so, because a while ago they were saying something about religious tourism, we pay attention to religious tourism, but that is not for the reasons to visit old tomb stones and return, now they have other goals, so that they can continue in their goals to make the area more Shia. We hear that this is occurring in Jordan, we did not hear the reasons for this at first, but the reasons are the proximity of Iran to us, the reasons of Iran in Iraq, and that the Shias in Iraq became more powerful and have a stronger voice, and movement, and also the complete opposite. The weakness of Sunnis in Iraq, and the influence of this on Iran, which we have been impacted by, I do not want to drag this on, I just ask of God that we continue to preserve what we have, being far from Iran is in our interest, but that does not mean that we should make Iran our enemy, because they are still a country, and regardless of what we read, and hopefully that is not true, these are the words of the media, and electronic not paper form, the sources are not reliable." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>275</sup> "There's a general feeling that Iran and Hezbollah target Sunni Muslims. People are angered by the Iranian intervention in the region, the sectarian rhetoric in the area, and the influence of Iran and Shias in the area. This is what I gather from speaking to people who sympathize with ISIS." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>276</sup> "The people I know who joined VEOs were always saying statements like Shias are coming to Jordan to kill all of us; we have to defend our women." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>277</sup> "When is there support for ISIS? When the goal of Iran is to kill the Sunnis. Now that their goals are against the Sunni population in Iraq, the only ones that can stand against them in Iraq, is the side that we do not support, it is ISIS because they are Sunnis. When we are discussing Sunnis and Shias we are talking about ISIS versus Iran." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

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*“As you know, social media networks expose different ideologies. In Salt, for example, you notice that most youths are now speaking about Shias and Sunnis and how we need to fight the Shias. The youths are becoming more violent and inhumane. When they see the atrocities of ISIS in Syria, this has no effect on people, as people are becoming more extreme against Shias. Facebook played a big role in dehumanizing and desensitizing people; they aren’t affected when they see the cruelty against the other, which is in this case the Shias. They discuss things like: do we follow these groups in the name of Islam? Do we fight with this group or that group? However, I feel that accepting the violent pictures and spreading them is support for VEOs. Publishing content on Facebook shows support for the actions of these groups.”*

*(Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)*

Figure 45: To what extent do you agree that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable?

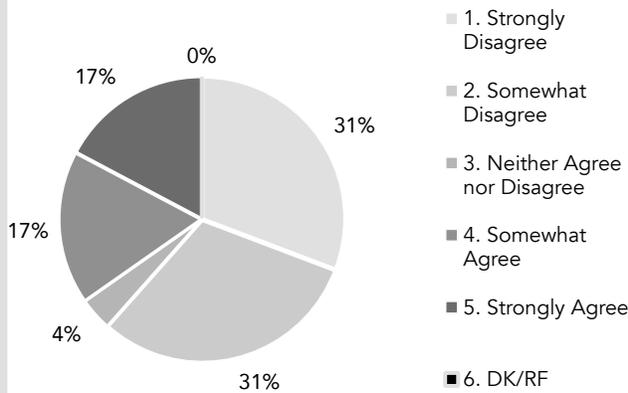
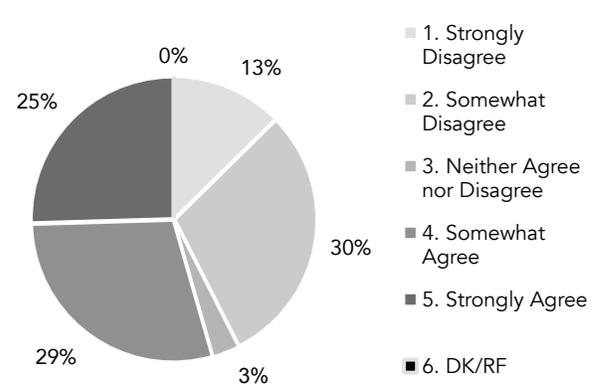


Figure 46: To what extent do you agree that Iranian interventionism in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?



Saudi Arabia is viewed as a positive influence on Jordan, although many also accuse it of contributing to racialization in Jordan.

The majority of respondents indicated that Saudi Arabia has a positive impact on Jordan (61 percent), mainly because it is respected as a political and economic regional leader that is viewed as contributing financial and development aid to Jordan, such as the construction of roads and parks (see Figure 47 below).<sup>278</sup> For instance, among other projects, the Saudi Development Fund and the Jordanian government signed a funding grant agreement in May 2015 to finance infrastructure projects for new industrial cities to be established in Balqa among other governorates, which is anticipated to create employment opportunities in the construction sector.<sup>279</sup> In contrast, the minority (35 percent) disagreed that Saudi Arabia has a positive impact on Jordan, mainly because some blame the country for

<sup>278</sup> “Most locals believe that KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] has a positive effect on Jordan since it is an Arab country and it supports Jordan with oil and with big projects like opening roads and parks.” (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>279</sup> Bhatia, Neha 2015. ‘KSA to fund industrial cities in Jordan worth \$30m’, Construction Week Online, June 01, 2015.

contributing to radicalization in Jordan and accuse it of disseminating Wahhabism and supporting Salafist Jihadist groups in the region and in Jordan.<sup>280</sup> For instance, Saudi Arabia is blamed for contributing to the dissemination of religious and violent extremist ideology, specifically by supporting radical imams in Jordan, such as those who support the teachings of prominent deceased Islamic scholars, such as Muhammad Nasiruddin Al Albani and Abd Al Aziz Ibn Baz, and spreading sectarian material, such as brochures and pamphlets, at schools and mosques.<sup>281</sup> Individuals from Saudi Arabia have reportedly also offered funding to local imams on the condition that they preach Salafist rather than Sufi or other teachings.<sup>282</sup> In fact, the perception that Saudi Arabia is free to support the Salafist Jihadists in Jordan has raised suspicions that the central government indirectly encourages radicalization and thereby reinforced views that it lacks the will to adequately counter radicalization and VE in Jordan.<sup>283</sup> Moreover, several respondents also reported that social networks that are engaged in recruitment activities into VEOs in Syria run through Saudi Arabia, as individuals travel from Jordan to Syria via Saudi Arabia and Turkey.<sup>284</sup>

*"My uncle is an imam in Amman and the Salafists from Saudi Arabia offered him funding to promote their ideology. They didn't want him to promote the fight in Iraq and Syria but spreading the Islamist ideology will lead to extremism. The Wahhabis, for example, think that the Shias are more dangerous than the Israeli Jews. I am sure they are part of the Saudi government, the Salafists that offered my uncle funding. They might not be official employees but Saudi Arabia is spending a lot of money to spread their Wahhabi ideology. I feel like they have occupied our curriculums at schools and our mosques, for instance by distributing pamphlets and brochures."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

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<sup>280</sup> "In particular Saudi Arabia [is to blame for radicalization in Jordan], history wise... Regarding Saudi Arabia, they helped in supporting Wahhabism and Salafism. Mohammed Abed Al Wahhab's ideology is the basic reason behind [radicalization]... The Saudi government supports and helps these groups." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>281</sup> "The Saudis are sending brochures and pamphlets. There is an imam that preaches the regulations of life according to Al Albani and Ibn Baz, the founders of terrorism in Jordan. In 2013, it was the year that I felt the danger of religion in our community. I realized that each sect is trying to win power and that they are working toward training people for jihad. Intelligence officers are chasing some imams that preach Salafist Jihadist and takfiri ideology. The government is fighting extremism from one end and supporting it from the other." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>282</sup> "My uncle is a sheikh, an imam, and Saudi Arabia offered to send him funding if he preaches for their Salafist movement to spread the ideology. My uncle is a Sufi and the Saudis don't like Sufism." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>283</sup> "I feel that the government is actually strengthening the violent extremists on the one hand and fighting them on the other. We sent our army to fight, while the mosques in Jordan are occupied by Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabi ideology." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>284</sup> "Radical people charge others to go fight and join, then they follow them through email, and then they prepare them for travel. They would go to Saudi Arabia, then to Turkey, and then to Syria." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

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Turkey is largely viewed as having contributed to radicalization in Jordan, mainly as a result of its role in the Syrian conflict.

Some respondents accused Turkey of contributing to radicalization in Jordan, mainly because they believe the country has knowingly facilitated the movement of Jordanian fighters into Syria.<sup>285</sup> For instance, several respondents reported that locals who leave to fight in Syria now mainly travel through Turkey, as crossing through the Jordanian-Syrian border is no longer possible following the implementation of tighter border controls.<sup>286</sup> In fact, one respondent reported that it has become easier to join groups in Syria since the smuggling route has mainly gone through Turkey, as Jordanians easily travel to Turkey as tourists.<sup>287</sup> In addition, Turkey's intervention in Syria is unpopular among locals, as it is thought to have had a negative impact on the region. Accordingly, 50 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that Turkey has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while 21 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 47 below).

*"I think this is not about Jordan [that people believe that Turkey has a negative impact] as much as about the intervention by Turkey in Syria [and its negative impact on the region]. It seems like most people object to any kind of intervention in Syria by any country."*

*(Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)*

Strong opposition to Israel is widespread, with some proclaiming that the liberation of Palestine is a greater priority than overthrowing the Assad Regime in Syria.

Most respondents expressed strong opposition to Israel, especially in West Bank Jordanian areas of the governorate, such as Baqa'a refugee camp, where youths as young as 12 declare Palestine to be their main political cause.<sup>288</sup> 76 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that Israel has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while only 20 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 47 below). In fact, Jordanians who have gone to fight abroad in Iraq and Syria are often not viewed positively in West Bank Jordanian areas, but also across the governorate more generally, as there is a sense among locals that they should have gone to fight for the liberation of Palestine instead.<sup>289</sup> This suggests that locals remain frustrated as a result of the continued occupation of

<sup>285</sup> "Turkey [is to blame for radicalization] because it is a gateway and for political reasons." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>286</sup> "[Those who go abroad to fight] go through the Iraqi border or they go through Turkey." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>287</sup> "It is easier to join groups in Syria now. The smuggling process is now from Jordan to Syria via Turkey as tourists. This is much easier than when they had to be smuggled into Jordan." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>288</sup> "As for the youth in the camp, we are speaking about the majority here, their main cause is Palestine. They don't approve of any other dialogue, you see this between youth of ages 12, 13, 14 and older; they believe that Palestine is their cause." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>289</sup> "[People in my community] look down on [Jordanians who have gone to fight abroad] and hate them. Honestly, people think that for a person to reach a point and want to die and be a martyr, he should go to Palestine. You are Palestinian... It's a priority to fight in Jerusalem, fight for the Al Aqsa mosque." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

Palestine and perceived lack of international support for the Palestinians. For instance, in October 2015 students at Al Balqa Applied University held a protest condemn the killing of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and attacks on the Al Aqsa Mosque.<sup>290</sup> There is also a growing perception that the Palestinian cause is being neglected by the Muslim community and attention to Syria is either misdirected entirely, for instance because the Syrian conflict is viewed as a domestic power struggle rather than legitimate jihad, and/or should not be the immediate priority for locals, constitutes a barrier to recruitment into VEOs in Syria. Crucially, while it might constitute a barrier to recruitment into VEOs in Syria, strong opposition to Israel remains a driver of VE more generally.

*"All conflicts have their effect on Jordan of course; Egypt, Syria and the main cause remains Palestine. The Arab citizen will always be disappointed if the Palestinian cause is not solved, it is the main cause for every Arab. As long as the problem of Palestine is not solved, we will always see violent extremists and problems in the Arab world."*

*(Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)*

**There is widespread agreement that the Syrian conflict has had a negative impact on the region and Jordan and also increased radicalization among locals.**

Most respondents agreed that the level of radicalization has noticeably increased in Balqa since the beginning of the Syrian conflict,<sup>291</sup> for instance explaining that the proximity to injustice and aggression in the region has increased propensity toward VE.<sup>292</sup> Accordingly, 65 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that Syria has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while 29 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 47 below). In particular, locals blamed the Arabic language news media in general, as well as Jordanian media in particular, for radicalization in Jordan, as its coverage of atrocities in Syria inadvertently mobilized locals to join VEOs to fight the Assad Regime.<sup>293</sup> In fact, several respondents even stated that locals who left Balqa to join VEOs in Syria were more concerned with becoming involved in the conflict than with the matter of which VEO to join.<sup>294</sup> While most respondents agreed that levels of radicalization in Balqa have increased since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, some also highlighted the negative impact of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.<sup>295</sup>

<sup>290</sup> Goussous, Suzanna 2015. 'University students around Jordan express solidarity with Palestinian resistance', Jordan Times, October 13, 2015.

<sup>291</sup> "The recent political situation is related to what is happening in the region, adding to that our youth interest in the recent events taking place around us. You hear now stories of victims in Salt who were attracted to extremist groups and were also killed in the areas where they were attracted." (Female, 41, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>292</sup> "They feel like that they live in this region and they see injustice and aggression around them." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>293</sup> "You can blame Arabic media and Jordanian media that have been showing what is happening in Syria for radicalizing people. It's provocative and encourages people to go fight the Syrian regime. It's a promotion for people to join the Salafist Jihadists." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>294</sup> "There are a lot of groups in Syria and at the end of the day they don't care who they join, so the entry point doesn't really matter to them either." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>295</sup> "Iraq had more of an impact on VE in Salt than Syria. Salt has many followers of the Ba'athists. During the time of Saddam Hussein, he offered many scholarships for Jordanians in Iraq. When the Iraqi regime fell, these people

Notably, one respondent maintained that the Syrian conflict has also impacted other groups in society, such as the educated, leftists, and elites, some of whom have also expressed radical views in support of Bashar Al Assad,<sup>296</sup> such as some Ba'athists for instance.<sup>297</sup>

*"Radical people become even more radical when they speak of Syria and the people they support. I'm not saying that extremism is increasing. It's just that I started seeing some people being affected by the crisis in Iraq and Syria. This means that our approach needs to change. How we talk to people is very important, we have to be very strong. I believe that those people do not believe in the role of the government in Jordan, so we have to find another way to talk to these people."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

**Some locals believe that Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict, and before that in Afghanistan in the 1990's, had a negative impact on Jordan.**

While most respondents indicated that Russia has a negative impact on Jordan, mainly as a result of its involvement in the Syrian conflict, views were not very strong; 38 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that Russia has a 'very' or 'somewhat' negative impact on Jordan, while 29 percent reported that it has a 'very' or 'somewhat' positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 47 below). In addition, Russia is blamed for having contributed to radicalization in Jordan, but also in Balqa in particular, through its occupation of Afghanistan in the 1990's, alluding to the wave of fighters who left Jordan to fight in Afghanistan.

*"Russia [is to blame for radicalization in Jordan because] when they occupied Afghanistan, they sowed the seed of jihad and violent extremism."*

*(Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)*

**The perceived situation on the ground in Syria is believed to significantly impact views in Jordan.**

Some respondents highlighted that the perceived situation on the ground in Syria impacts levels of radicalization, support for VEOs, and stability in Jordan. For instance, perceived military gains made by VEOs in Syria impact the rhetoric of their supporters in Jordan, with some toning their speeches down following losses by VEOs in Syria. Some other respondents also added that the messy situation on the ground in Syria has somewhat encouraged religious moderation, as it is regarded as a warning as to how

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fought with the Ba'athists. People became more extreme after that, the religious became more religious and people went to extremes in general." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>296</sup> "I feel the conflict in Syria didn't only affect the extremist groups. In fact, it affected the cultured elite here in Jordan. Some you would think were ready to go and fight for Bashar Al Assad. The conflict in Syria influenced everyone, also the communists, the cultured, and the elites." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>297</sup> "We have the Assad Ba'athists who support Syria, and the Saddam Ba'athists who disagree with the first group and we have a third group of Ba'athists who support neither." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

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a situation can develop when there is support for radical religious groups,<sup>298</sup> and that some locals are hesitant to proclaim their support for different VEOs that are active in Syria because the situation is too unclear.<sup>299</sup> For instance, the opaque situation in regard to where VEOs, most notably JN and ISIS, receive support and funding from is a matter of controversy and has reportedly reduced support for VEOs in Syria.<sup>300</sup> Furthermore, some respondents also indicated that the stability of Jordan would depend on events in Syria and the resolution of the conflict that will be achieved in the future, for instance a controversial peace treaty in Syria could also have a negative impact on Jordan.<sup>301</sup>

*“Extremism is becoming less of a problem because VEOs in Syria and Iraq are now having less of an influence there. Anyone who is following what’s happening in Iraq and Syria can notice that in the media. Whenever you see them in cemeteries, a sheikh would stand and give speeches, as if they wait for a certain death to preach to people. Now you don’t see that. And this is all related to what’s happening in Iraq and Syria, so ultimately they are withdrawing in the field. They used to feel that they had success on the ground and are achieving their goals and their voices were louder then.”*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

**While the FSA retains strong support, support was greater in earlier years of the Syrian conflict.**

Most respondents indicated that support for the FSA is strong, mainly because locals continue to associate the FSA with the early years of the Syrian revolution, when it was seen as representing the Syrian people and confidence in the justifiability of fighting was greater. Accordingly, 54 percent of Balqa GQ respondents reported that there is ‘strong’ or ‘some’ support for the FSA in their community, while 35 percent reported that there is ‘strong’ or ‘some’ opposition the FSA in their community (see Figure 47 below). In contrast, there is opposition to the involvement of foreign powers in the conflict in general, and foreign funding of the FSA in particular, and a perception that the Syrian people have become sidelined in the conflict. Furthermore, some respondents noted that they are poorly informed about the activities of the FSA and therefore do not feel able to make a judgment as to whether they support or oppose the group.

<sup>298</sup> “People in Balqa are scared of things becoming as chaotic as in Syria. ISIS is very important because people can see what VEOs can lead them toward. Syria is a warning to them and people are blaming VEOs for what has happened. In particular, ISIS is changing people’s minds on religious groups.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

<sup>299</sup> “The situation is messy though and so it is difficult to differentiate between different groups and what they are doing. There is no true news about what is going on in Syria and who is doing what... People now don’t support any of the VEOs because no one really understands the situation in Syria. There are over 100 armed groups. They can’t understand the situation and it is too messy to understand and so people cannot have strong views on what is happening in Syria.” (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)

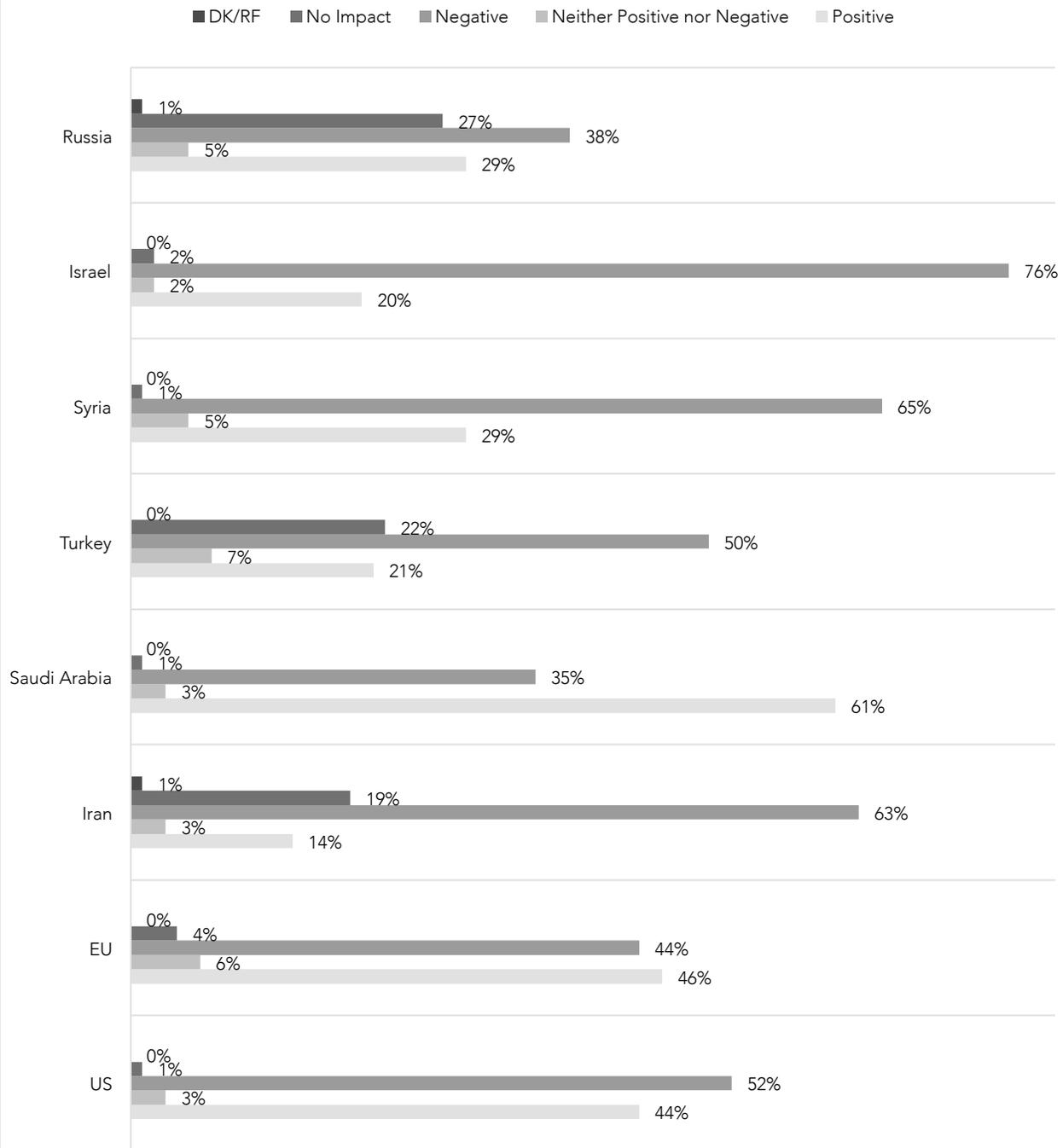
<sup>300</sup> “There are many speculations behind how these groups were initiated and who supports them and who gives them money, specifically ISIS or JN. Everyone knows that all of these groups in Syria have their own support groups.” (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>301</sup> “[How regional events will impact Jordan] depends mainly on how events turn out in neighboring countries, mainly Syria and Iraq. The reaction in Jordan depends on what happens in Syria and Iraq. If there is an unfair deal in Syria, like Dayton, people will be disappointed.” (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

*"I am not sure what my opinion is on the FSA. Is there still such a thing? In the beginning we felt like the FSA was representing the Syrian revolution and had a cause fighting a dictatorial regime. However, later on the situation became more complicated. It is unclear who is supporting them. Now there seems to be ISIS versus the regime rather than the FSA. Most of the people have been killed and died in Syria and the other portion of them are refugees in Jordan or in Europe so where are the Syrian people? It doesn't seem to be about the Syrian people anymore."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

Figure 47: To what extent do you think that the following countries have a positive or negative impact on Jordan?



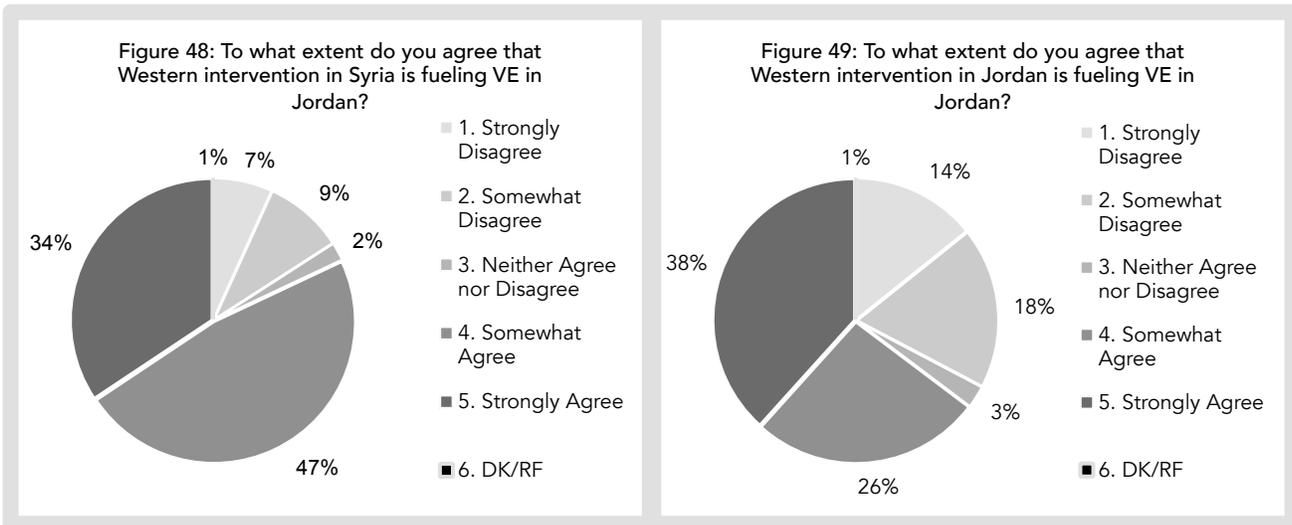
## 5.2 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC INTERVENTIONISM

There are serious concerns that Western intervention in both Syria and Jordan is fueling VE and destabilizing the country.

The vast majority of locals is opposed to Western intervention in the region, in general, and involvement in the Syrian conflict, in particular, with most blaming the involvement of Western countries for the escalation of the conflict and failed attempts to achieve a settlement. Accordingly, 64 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Western intervention in Jordan is fueling VE in Jordan, while 32 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 48). In addition, locals are concerned that the Syrian conflict has had a negative impact on the national security of Jordan, in particular by driving Syrian refugees into the country, and 81 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Western intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan, while 16 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 49). Opposition to Western intervention in the region is also widely linked to greater propensity toward recruitment into VEOs, which are viewed as standing up to the West (see 7.0 Communication Drivers and Barriers).

*"Salt is not marginalized but as I said, there is more than one way that leads to extremism, either frustration from economic and social reality, and also frustration from the regional Islamic reality, seeing Muslims mistreated and killed everywhere while the world watches, this leads to radicalization, this is what's happening in Salt from what I've seen."*

*(Male, 55, Former MP, Zarqa)*



Many locals question whether Jordanian intervention against ISIS in Syria is justifiable and there are serious concerns that Jordanian intervention in Syria risks fueling VE and destabilizing the country.

While most locals support the Jordanian intervention against ISIS, and even more so since the killing of Kasasbeh, views as to whether the Jordanian intervention against ISIS is justifiable were mixed. While 50 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that Jordanian intervention against ISIS in Syria is justifiable, 45 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 50). Many respondents indicated opposition to the greater involvement of Jordan in the Syrian conflict, mainly out of fear that greater intervention in Syria might destabilize Jordan, explaining that domestic security needs to be the priority and that greater Jordanian involvement in the Syrian conflict might increase VE in Jordan, destabilize the country, and risk retaliation by the Assad Regime and/or VEOs. In fact, the majority of respondents (59 percent) reported that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan, while fewer (38 percent) disagreed (see Figure 51). In particular, since the government announcement of its discovery of ISIS sleeper cells in Irbid in March 2016, there have been growing concerns over retaliations by ISIS sleeper cells within Jordan, with some also pointing to attacks in Turkey to illustrate the danger posed by ISIS. As a consequence, there is substantial support for Jordanian neutrality in the Syrian conflict.<sup>302</sup>

*"It is not understandable what is happening [in the Syrian conflict]. Extremism will decrease in the future but if Jordan got into war, things will be much worse in Jordan and there will be a strong response from people. We know who the real enemy is, which is ISIS. We work against them. Jordan worked against them... We have focused more on security now, which is positive. The government is achieving change and that is very good. I saw what happened in Turkey and I believe Turkey's involvement in the war in Syria is wrong. Now their country is in danger. I hope that Jordan will not enter the war because if we do, the Syrian government is evil and they will take us down. It is important that we don't enter the war or we will see extremism increase in Jordan."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

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<sup>302</sup> "Jordan is the number one country that has been affected by the Syrian refugee crisis and people feel like if Jordan intervened in Syria, ISIS sleeper cells among the refugees might respond. They feel like Jordan should not get involved in any wars, since it is historically a host to refugees and protects and stands with the people of other countries and they should provide for them and offer them a safe place away from any conflict or crisis." (Male, 25, Freelancer, Balqa)

Figure 50: To what extent do you agree that Jordan's intervention against ISIS in Syria is justifiable?

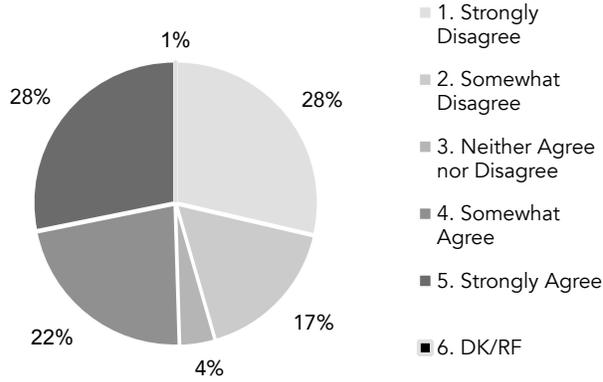
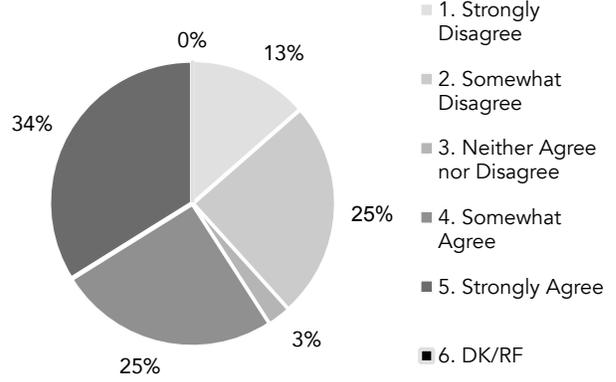


Figure 51: To what extent do you agree that Jordan's intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?

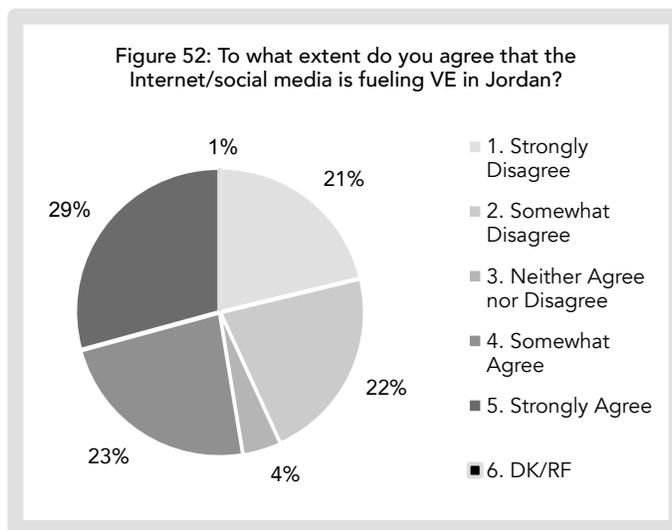


## 6.0 COMMUNICATION DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

### 6.1 THE ROLE OF VE PROPAGANDA

There is strong concern that VEO propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan but locals are less certain whether the Internet plays a critical role in disseminating VEO narratives.

Most locals are concerned that VEO propaganda has been fueling VE in Jordan and 61 percent and 58 percent of Balqa GQ respondents respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that ISIS and JN propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan, while 33 percent and 36 percent respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figures 53 and 54). In particular, respondents emphasized the importance of face-to-face meetings, since they are less vulnerable to detection by the security forces.<sup>303</sup> Further, the Internet/social media is also viewed as playing an important role in fueling VE and driving recruitment into VEOs in Jordan.<sup>304</sup> Most notably, locals who left Jordan to join VEOs in Syria in some cases still maintain a presence on Facebook and remain in touch with locals from their communities in Jordan, posting messages on Facebook, including threats to locations in Jordan, and engaging in online debates, in which locals sometimes counter VEO narratives.<sup>305</sup>



However, while acknowledging the importance of social media networks in making contact,<sup>306</sup> since VEO members use the Internet and social media websites to identify locals who are receptive to their messages and then target those individuals specifically, respondents highlighted that they then move on

<sup>303</sup> "Now, everything is available for communication but in general they meet directly, for instance in mosques. They would follow them and then attract them because it is safer to meet in person." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>304</sup> "Some locals think the media and social media are the main tools that youths use to connect with VEOs and the videos that those groups publish convince youths to join." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>305</sup> "Even previously I used to face problems with some guys through Facebook about ISIS but now it became different. They feel cautious of what they write on Facebook. One of the guys I fought with wrote on Facebook that he would come back for Karak, I was harsh on him and told him in your dreams. He wasn't a friend. He is a guy I met when I was at university. He used to be around situations where violence is present. People used to look up to me as a leader in my city and I used to solve problems, so it was normal for me to know such troublemakers. This guy used to be very violent; we were close but not friends. He and his brother went to Syria and joined ISIS two years ago. He was radical in his behavior, now he became radical with ISIS. He now believes in killing everyone who doesn't abide by religion but he wasn't like this before and he changed later." (Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>306</sup> "Now there is technology and the new means of communications around us, and the rise of social media, in addition to the large numbers of videos being posted on social networks. You can see that now youths do not need to go to a certain place to know about those groups, they can find them easily through social media, especially with the use of videos, these thoughts of radical groups can reach people easily." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

to arrange phone calls and face-to face meetings with members of their network,<sup>307</sup> especially when facilitating their travel to Syria with passports and money for instance.<sup>308</sup> Furthermore, some stated that the role of the Internet in recruitment has also diminished since many of those locals who were previously involved in online propaganda and recruitment activities have since died fighting for VEOs in Syria or faced restrictions by the government physically as well as online.<sup>309</sup> Consequently, declining support for the view that the Internet fuels VE in Jordan likely results from increased confidence that the central government, international governments, social media companies, and other actors are monitoring the online activities of VEOs.<sup>310</sup> While many remain concerned that the government indiscriminately applies anti-terrorism laws to target innocent civilians, including journalists, this highlights that many also credit the government with tackling the spread of VE online and thereby curbing the influence of VEOs.<sup>311</sup> In fact, views in regard to whether the Internet fuels VE in Jordan were mixed; 52 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the Internet/social media is fueling VE in Jordan, while 43 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 52).

*"Following a Facebook post about one of the guys who died there, a girl sent a comment saying that she doesn't want to see me saying bad things about our martyrs. This guy died when he was fighting with radical groups. His brother knows me and he used to talk to me and we used to fight on Facebook. Look here, he cursed the country. He didn't like what I had to say about his dead brother. I told him many times that this country is above anything. I wrote him that we have to stop talking. I used to write about those criminals. I told that guy that I will always stand against ISIS and he wrote comments telling me not to write about the martyrs and that he is thankful that there are martyrs from Salt. He is from the Tamoun area."*

*(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)*

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<sup>307</sup> "These groups aren't present on the ground in my community. It's the environment, where there are people close to ISIS. They go to individuals they believe have the basis and they speak to them face-to-face. It's not through mosques or the media. The Internet, there's a daily interaction, they see who is interacting with their posts, and they target those who interact with them." (Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)

<sup>308</sup> "Violent extremists communicate with locals over the Internet, through specific pages and groups, then through phone calls, and then they would send them to meet with someone to help them in their country. They would provide passports, money, etc." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>309</sup> "I see that social media is still being used by these groups, but not as much because, as I said before, most of the Jordanians who went there died, plus the government played a major role restricting their travel." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

<sup>310</sup> "It looks like people like ISIS fighters are very popular on Twitter for example but what I know according to Al Ghad newspaper is that most of them were closed by [the international hacker group] Anonymous and Twitter." (Male, 31, Election Monitor, Balqa)

<sup>311</sup> "Recently, there has been a noticed disappearance of our people who joined ISIS who were active online for a simple reason, which is that most of them were actually killed in the conflict zones. I think that our situation is actually better now because of the control imposed by the government agencies. The strength of Jordanian law is actually playing a major role in scaring VEO supporters to talk about it." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

Figure 53: To what extent do you agree that ISIS propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan?

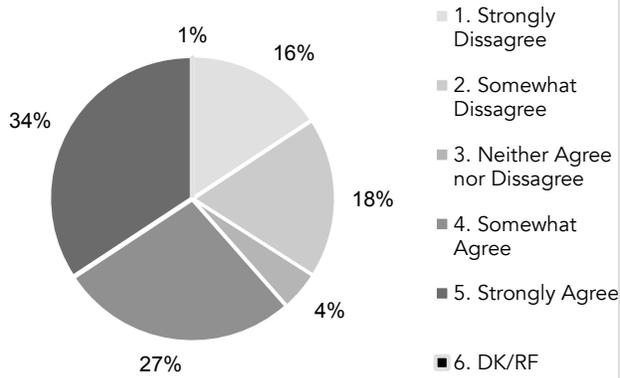
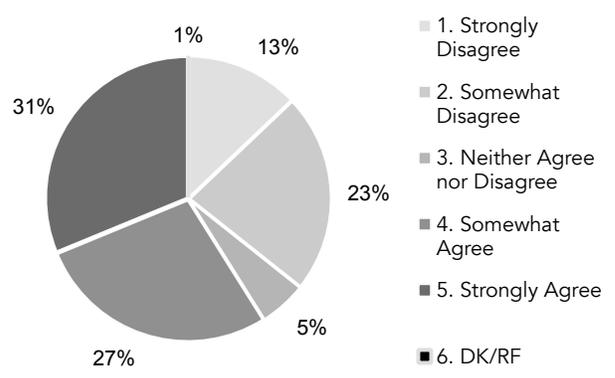


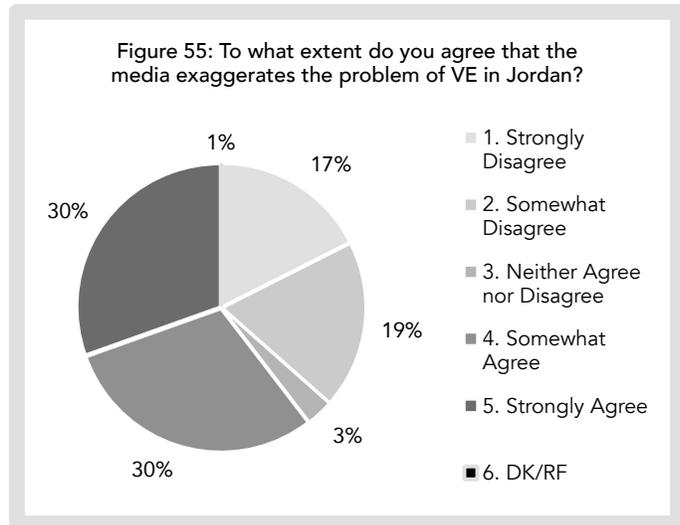
Figure 54: To what extent do you agree that JN propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan?



## 6.2 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

While most locals are concerned that VE in Balqa is on the rise, they believe that the media has misrepresented the extent of the problem.

Most respondents agreed that VE constitutes a serious and growing problem in Balqa, especially in politically and economically marginalized areas such as Baqa'a refugee camp, but are concerned that the media has exaggerated the extent of the problem, even in Baqa'a refugee camp. More specifically, while respondents confirmed that VEO members, most notably ISIS members, are engaged in recruitment activities in Baqa'a refugee camp, they maintained that the media has exaggerated to the point that the entire camp is seemingly under the control of VEOs, when this is in fact not the case. Accordingly, 60 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan, while 36 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 55).



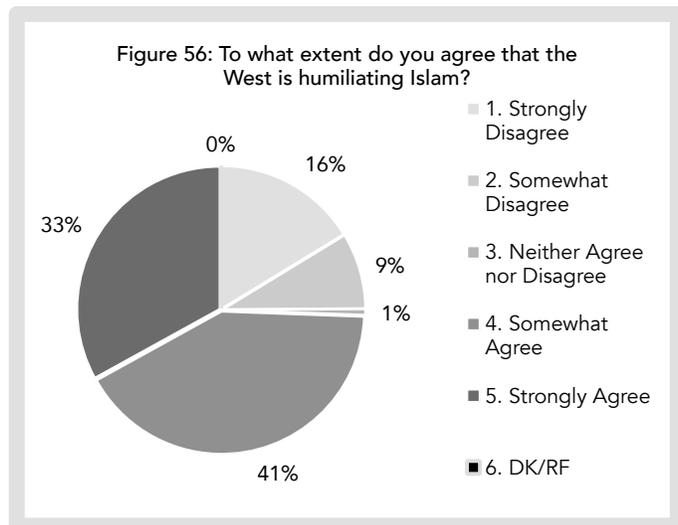
*"[VE] exists, however I feel it has been blown out of proportion by the media. I mean that the media exaggerates how many extremists are residing in [Baqa'a] refugee camp. We do have a problem; it exists, however it is not proportional with the media hype around it. They are trying to portray the refugee camp as if it were under the stronghold of violent extremist groups, when it is not."*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

### 6.3 THE ROLE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

The foreign and domestic policies of many Western governments are interpreted as evidence that the West is humiliating Islam by many locals.

Many respondents maintained that the domestic, but especially foreign, policies of Western countries toward the Middle East are unbalanced and unjust, fueling the perception that Muslims are under attack in countries across the globe, while the international community is not taking any actions to protect them. This has contributed to widespread resentment toward the West and also contributed to some locals opting to join VEOs.<sup>312</sup> Most recently, the perception that the international community was ineffectually standing by while the Assad Regime targeted the Syrian people contributed to the appeal of VEOs in Syria for locals to join them. Some even



interpret trade deals and globalization as a form of colonization and one-sided relationship that favors the interests of the West. Accordingly, 74 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the West is humiliating Islam, while 25 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 56). Worryingly, although most respondents (54 percent) disagreed that it is better to die in revenge than to live on in shame, a significant minority (40 percent) agreed, which suggests that some locals might be prepared to take actions by participating in VEOs to rectify these perceived injustices, as also suggested by justifications provided by respondents in support of violent jihad in Europe (see 5.0 External Drivers and Barriers and Figure 57).

There is also evidence that the view that Western governments persecute Muslims, both abroad and within their own countries, has also tainted how development projects that are funded by Western countries are viewed, as they are suspected of ultimately furthering the interests of the West.<sup>313</sup> Moreover, these suspicions also affect government policies for locals, as most view the government as acting on orders from the West, as indicated by quantitative findings that the majority (59 percent) of respondents agreed that the central government just does what the West says, while a minority (37 percent) disagreed (see Figure 58).

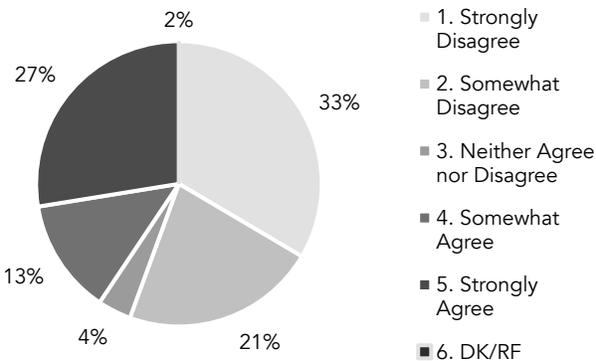
<sup>312</sup> "Salt is not marginalized but as I said, there is more than one way that leads to extremism, either frustration from economic and social reality, and also frustration from the regional Islamic reality, seeing Muslims mistreated and killed everywhere while the world watches, this leads to radicalization, this is what's happening in Salt from what I've seen." (Male, 55, Former MP, Zarqa)

<sup>313</sup> "If you try to attack or criticize the Islam, you are no better than ISIS... An explosion by a Muslim is called a terrorist attack while an explosion by a non-Muslim is called an attack by a mentally ill person. In the city of Salt, I can't defend many development projects, such as community tourism, in front of many people just because they feel that others persecute Muslims." (Male, 28, Activist, Balqa)

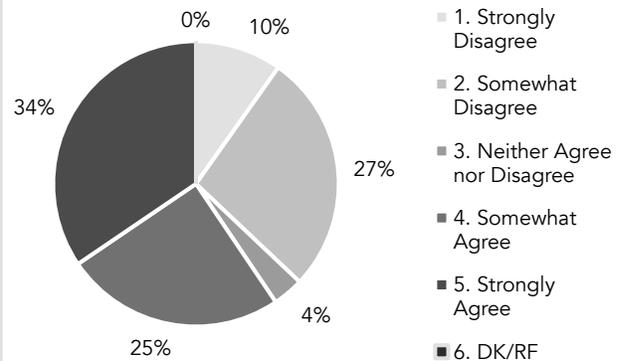
*"The West wasn't fair in dealing with the Middle East or anything but the West. The Islamic world was more oppressed; even globalization is a kind of occupation and colonization... Letting Assad get away with all the cruelty that he's put the Syrian people through led to the creation of an even more violent and extremist group, like ISIS."*

*(Male, 46, Academic, Balqa)*

**Figure 57: To what extent do you agree that it is better to die in revenge than to live on in shame?**



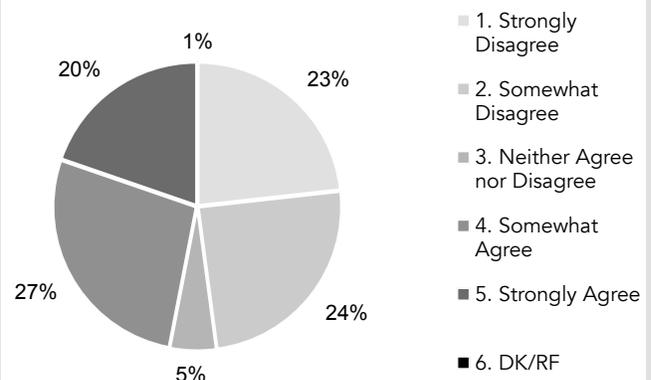
**Figure 58: To what extent do you agree that the central government just does what the West say?**



**Views on whether the Caliphate will help to restore Islam are mixed among locals.**

Some respondents reported that the strong appeal of the establishment of a Caliphate, specifically the narratives of Muslims uniting under a system of governance that is based on Islam, and perception that ISIS as a powerful group that has been successful in implementing the Caliphate strongly resonate with some locals and drive them to join the VEO. However, others highlighted that support for the establishment of a Caliphate does not equate to support for ISIS, in particular since support for the VEO has drastically declined among locals, especially since 2015. As a result, views in regard to support for the establishment of a Caliphate were found to be mixed; 47 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the Caliphate will help restore Islam, while 47 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 59).

**Figure 59: To what extent do you agree that the Caliphate will help restore Islam?**



*"The main reason that people join VEOs is religion. These groups do not believe in nationalism, it's*

*all about Islam for them. You would never hear them talk about being Arabs. You would only hear them say: we as Muslims. All they want is to return to the era of the Prophet and the Caliphate. Ultimately, since there is a strong group invading the region, they want to be part of it and they want their voices to be heard. We are speaking here about ISIS in particular."*

*(Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)*

**Support the view that religion should play a greater role in the justice system is strong and VEO narratives that appeal to Sharia law resonate with a segment of the local population.**

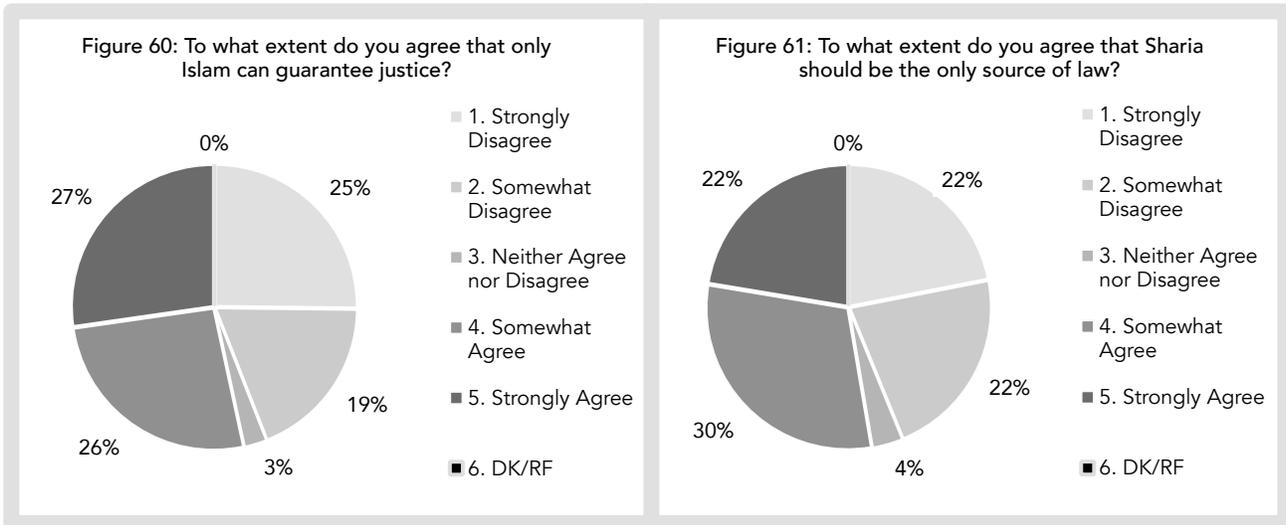
Some respondents linked support for a greater role of religion in the justice system, in particular among Salafist Jihadists, with support for VEOs, since they believe that the government should adopt Sharia law, is apostate, does not represent them, and needs to be overthrown.<sup>314</sup> Crucially, support for a large role of religion in the implementation of justice was found to be strong; 53 and 52 percent of Balqa GQ respondents respectively 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed, while 44 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that only Islam can guarantee justice (see Figures 60 and 61).

*"Once, among a group of youths in Salt, I started talking about the dangers of extremism. This was before Moath Al Kasasbeh. They exploded in my face saying that these groups are implementing the Sharia, and the adulterer should be stoned for instance. This is Sharia. The thief should have his hand cut. Some of these are state officials. However, after Moath, I don't think the ideology changed, however people don't speak about this anymore. If you now speak about ISIS positively, people would stand against you. The state has its role of course. There is no leniency with extremism. However, the general view is against ISIS now."*

*(Male, 37, Political Analyst, Balqa)*

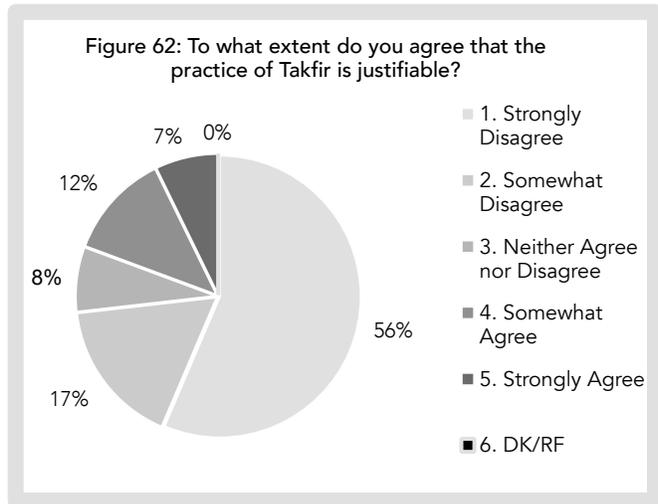
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<sup>314</sup> "The Salafist Jihadist ideology considers this current way of governing Jordan to be wrong because we should be following Sharia. They don't deal with politics, with the government, because they consider them to be apostates. They don't think that you should deal with the government in any way. They think that the King does not represent them and should not be ruling. Sharia should be used to define the law. Instead, we use foreign laws that are from Europe and from the US even though the laws we should follow are articulated by Sharia." (Female, 32, Activist, Amman)



Despite an increasing rejection of radical religious groups and views among locals, some continue to view the practice of Takfir as justifiable.

While the majority of respondents disagreed that the practice of Takfir is justifiable, in accordance with a growing current of rejection of religiously radical groups and views among the wider local population, nearly one in five Balqa GQ respondents maintained that the practice of Takfir is justifiable. Specifically, 73 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed that the practice of Takfir is justifiable, while as many as 19 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed (see Figure 62). In particular, support for the practice of Takfir is strong among members of the increasingly isolated Salafist Jihadist community, which grew in the early years of the Syrian conflict but has since been weakened as a result of members leaving for Syria and greater government pressure.



*"Takfirist ideology is to blame for radicalization in Jordan. We have separate houses of worship for people from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the MB, and the takfirists. This is wrong. There should only be one place of worship. In the recent Eid celebrations they did a procedure and they only created one place for praying. The takfirists were not able to pray because they were stopped and there were fewer of them. In the mosque of the Ministry of Religious Affairs there were 600 people, in the takfirist mosque there were 200. The takfirist mosques became present only after the Syria crisis. I believe that the security forces took measures against them."*

(Male, 27, Activist, Balqa)

**While most locals desire peace with Israel and prioritize stability, most view violent jihad in Israel as justifiable and the Jordan-Israel peace treaty as an act of betrayal.**

There is strong support for Palestine among locals and, in particular, many respondents highlighted the justifiability of the Palestinian struggle to regain occupied land. Many also maintained that participation in jihad for the liberation of Palestine is justifiable for all Arabs and/or Muslims, explaining that the Palestinian cause is the original cause for all Arabs and highlighting that the social, political, historical, economic, and geographic proximity of Palestine to Jordan mean it should take priority to other conflicts for Jordanians.<sup>315</sup> Accordingly, 74 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable, while 22 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 63). Most respondents also expressed opposition to the Jordan-Israel peace treaty, highlighting that many locals have reluctantly accepted peace with Israel. 69 percent of Balqa GQ respondents 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agreed that the Jordan-Israel peace treaty is an act of betrayal for Islam and Arabs, while 28 percent 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed (see Figure 64). At the same time, the minimal support for Israel mainly stems from support for the peace treaty and strong desire for peace and stability among locals.<sup>316</sup> As a result of strong support for the justifiability of jihad in Israel, some oppose locals who have left to participate in jihad in Syria, since there is a sense that they should have prioritized participating in jihad in Israel. In fact, some locals who have not left to fight in Syria have reportedly explained that they chose to remain Jordan because the conditions for jihad have not been fulfilled in Syria, although they are in the case of Israel.<sup>317</sup> Additionally, some commented that, while ISIS and JN are currently prioritizing other goals over the liberation of Palestine, they would likely garner greater local support toward that end, despite strong local opposition to VEOs, as liberating Palestine is ultimately viewed as more important.<sup>318</sup> This suggests that a substantial portion of male youths from Balqa who did not leave to fight in Syria could be vulnerable to mobilization by VEOs to fight in Israel.

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<sup>315</sup> "I respect Hamas for fighting in Palestine... they have the right to fight Israel, and even cooperate with Iran or the US toward the goal of liberating Palestine. They can even announce it to be an Islamic state because they are part of the Palestinian people." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>316</sup> "Those who believe that Israel has a positive effect on Jordan say this because since the peace treaty was signed between Jordan and Israel no conflict has happened between them." (Male, 48, Real Estate Agent, Balqa)

<sup>317</sup> "I could only join jihad in Palestine because it's an occupied Arab land that we need to liberate. I would only defend Palestine because I believe that solving the Palestinian cause would solve all of our problems. At any point I can go to defend Palestine. I would be the first to go. Two of my friends who are religiously committed decided to go to Palestine to carry out an attack but they got caught at the bridge and arrested. I was asking them after they got out why they had not gone to fight in Syria and they said: why would we, it is not jihad in Syria. We are committed and religious but I don't think that Syria is the place to go to fight. Don't you think that all of these efforts, if they had been focused on Palestine, could have achieved something? I don't understand why everyone is so hyped up about Syria and everyone forgot about Palestine." (Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)

<sup>318</sup> "I am not saying ISIS or JN or others specifically, but any entity which has the capability to act against the Zionist entity, or against a friend of the Zionist entity, has support, so even if non-believers do something in Israel, everyone will support them, but right now they are acting with a different approach, not to free Palestine, and for that reason people are not supporting them." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

*"Palestine is an occupied country and Israel is an occupation that has stolen land that does not belong to them. That is why jihad in Israel is justifiable. It is justifiable because they are being occupied. However, it is a cause that is not only relevant to the Palestinians but it is relevant for all Arabs. Europe and the US and other countries support Israel. That is why we as Arabs should stand with Palestine. The relationship between Jordan and Palestine is very close socially, politically, historically, and economically. The Palestinian cause needs a solution and this takes priority. What is happening in other countries in the MENA region has taken attention away from Palestine and Palestine is no longer the central cause. It is not more important but it is the original cause for all Arabs. Instead of going to liberate other countries from their dictatorial regimes we should first get rid of the occupation of Israel. Those people who fight in Syria should go to do jihad in Palestine."*

*(Male, 32, Small Business Owner, Balqa)*

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

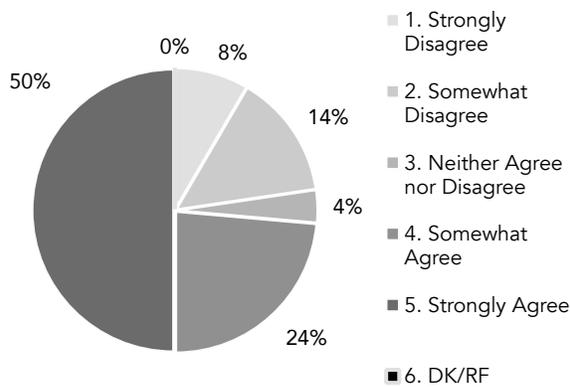
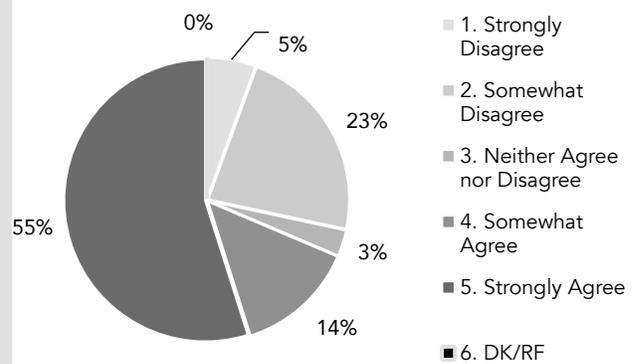
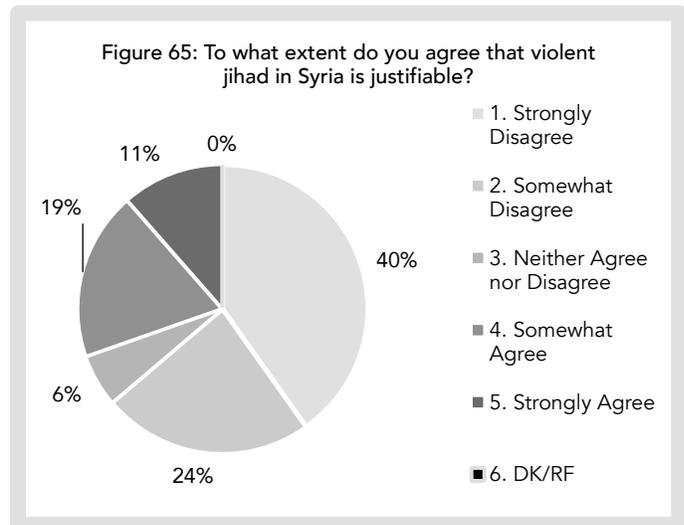


Figure 64: To what extent do you agree that the Jordan-Israel peace treaty is an act of betrayal for Islam and Arabs?



Opposition to participation in jihad in Syria is on the rise but a significant minority of locals believes it is justifiable, mainly as a result of fatwas issues by prominent religious leaders.

The proclamations of the Salafist Jihadist leadership in support of going to fight in Syria strongly resonated with some youths from Balqa, such as Baqa'a refugee camp, and mobilized them to join VEOs in Syria, with one respondent even equating the drive among youths to participate in the Syrian conflict with a basic instinct.<sup>319</sup> This is supported by reports that some locals joined VEOs in Syria with the aim of supporting the people of Syria against the Assad Regime, against Shias, and with medical aid, among other forms of support.<sup>320</sup> In particular, the fatwa that was issued by Al Maqdisi, and subsequently supported by Al Tahawi, proclaiming that the conflict in Syria fulfills the requirements for legitimate jihad, which is a religious duty in Islam once the requirements are met, convinced persons in Jordan that jihad in Syria is justifiable.<sup>321</sup> In fact, while the majority of respondents (64 percent) disagreed that jihad in Syria is justifiable, a significant number (30 percent) agreed (see Figure 65). Notably, in contrast to the Salafist Jihadists, Salafist Quietist leaders have maintained that the conditions for legitimate jihad are not met in Syria.



*"Jihad is a duty in Islam if the conditions are afforded to go and participate. A lot of Salafist Jihadist leaders said that the conditions are afforded now for jihad in Syria and this is the message that they sent at the beginning of the Syrian revolution. Salafist Quietest leaders disagreed and said that the conditions are not afforded. They are more moderate and they do not think that jihad is appropriate now."*

*(Female, 32, Activist, Amman)*

<sup>319</sup> "It is easier for the youth, religious and from Salafist Jihadist groups, to be affected by the conflict in Syria, as they have a leader and they are following basic instinct." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

<sup>320</sup> "He did not go for what we can call routine reasons, like poverty, or due to bad conditions, or unemployment, he went because he had a personal conviction to participate in humanitarian work... he graduated with a medical degree with very high grades and he wanted to join in order to help or provide aid." (Male, 51, MP, Balqa)

<sup>321</sup> "The fatwa that was issued by Abu Muhammad Al Maqdisi contributed to radicalization. He said that fighting in Syria is considered jihad and it is a duty and that all prerequisites for jihad are now fulfilled in Syria. Al Tahawi also supported this fatwa." (Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)

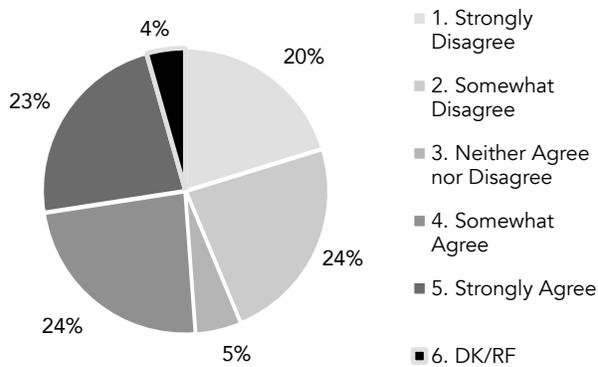
**Some locals are skeptical whether the reality on the ground in Syria matches the expectations of potential recruits and image projected through VEO media content.**

While many respondents agreed that youths who face financial difficulties, lack access to employment opportunities, and are marginalized from their communities are the most vulnerable to recruitment into VEOs appeal to youths by offering them opportunities for employment, and income, and a community into which to integrate, respondents were less certain whether VEOs provide such opportunities in practice. 47 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that VEO members always look after each other, while 44 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 66). In the same vein, while many respondents reported that VEOs appeal to local youths with success stories and by projecting themselves as militarily and financially powerful, they were less convinced that VEOs have made these gains in reality. Accordingly, 47 percent of Balqa GQ respondents ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agreed that VEO members are skilled fighters, while 45 percent ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ disagreed (see Figure 67). Notably, growing skepticism toward VEO narratives constitutes a significant barrier to recruitment.

*“Anyone who is looking for a strong representative [might be vulnerable to radicalization]. ISIS portrays itself as strong and violent. People who are looking to succeed, whether positively or negatively, and who have a thirst for power might be drawn to this.”*

*(Male, 31, Journalist, Balqa)*

**Figure 66: To what extent do you agree that VEO members always look after each other?**



**Figure 67: To what extent do you agree that VEO members are skilled fighters?**

