

Drivers And Barriers Impacting Propensity Toward Violent Extremism

IRBID: TARGET LOCATION ANALYSIS



Irbid City, Irbid governorate.

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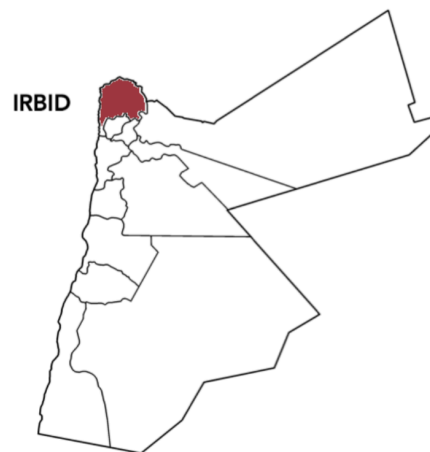
List of Acronyms

AQ:	Al Qa'ida
CVE:	Counter Violent Extremism
DK:	'Don't Know' (GQ Answers)
FSA:	Free Syrian Army
GID:	General Intelligence Directorate (Jordan)
GQ:	Guided Questionnaire
IAF:	Islamic Action Front
ISIS:	Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham
JAF:	Jordanian Armed Forces
JD:	Jordanian Dinar
JN:	Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) ¹
KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MB:	Muslim Brotherhood
MP:	Member of Parliament
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC:	Norwegian Refugee Council
RF:	'Refuse to Answer' (GQ Answers)
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
VE:	Violent Extremism
VEO:	Violent Extremist Organization

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

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the birth of Jordan's Salafist Jihadist current in the 1990s, Irbid has come to accommodate a large number of the movement's followers. However, it was only after the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011 that the governorate really became a major security concern with regard to violent extremism (VE) and the influence of violent extremist organizations (VEOs). While formerly eclipsed by VE hotspots such as Ma'an and Zarqa, Irbid has rapidly emerged as one of the principal seedbeds of VE in Jordan. Indeed, many of Jordan's most prominent Salafist Jihadists - notably those who identify themselves with the "Zarqawi wing" of the movement, whose loyalty now lies with Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham (ISIS) - have been residents of Irbid: most notoriously Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi, Omar Mahdi Al Zaydan and Saad Al Hunayti. The existence of VEO support in Irbid is also manifest in numerous public commemorations, or "martyrs weddings" for locals who have died fighting with Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Nusra Front) (JN) or ISIS. Furthermore, the widely reported March 2016 raid on an alleged ISIS cell within the governorate's Hanina neighborhood has pushed Irbid toward the top of Jordan's list of VE security priorities.



Except for Hamas, which like many in the rest of Jordanian society, Irbid residents largely consider a legitimate resistance organization, absolute levels of support for VEOs are low. Though JN receives higher levels of popularity than ISIS among Irbid's general population, the group's reputation has plummeted from the levels it enjoyed after it emerged as a player in the Syrian conflict, when it was more clearly recognized as a resistance movement against the Assad regime. ISIS's support base has also diminished rapidly, most obviously since the organization murdered Moath Al Kasasbeh in January 2015. However, specifically within Irbid's Salafist Jihadist movement, support for ISIS has been more robust and the organization's following within this circle appears to be surpassing that of JN. Demonstrative of this shift, and perhaps even influencing it, is the fact that by October 2014, Al Tahawi, Al Zaydan and Al Hunayti had all switched their allegiance from JN to ISIS.

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), enjoy relatively high levels of support in Irbid, especially in urban areas where a large proportion of Jordan's West Bank population resides. Despite concerns about the MB's and IAF's ideological similarities to the ideologies of leading VEOs, many locals recognize the capacity for these organizations to serve as buffers against more extreme Islamist groups. For this to be effective however, these groups require strengthening if they are to maintain and broaden their appeal. Thus, the MB's internal fragmentation and the government's closure (in 2016) of the MB Irbid headquarters may be a cause for concern. This is particularly the case in an environment such as Irbid where moderate Islamic influences are reportedly wanting, and potentially overshadowed by more extreme manifestations of Islamic representation. For example, other non-violent Islamist organizations in Irbid, such as Salafist Quietists, hold very little sway over locals and are somewhat socially inconsequential. Indeed, a considerable proportion of respondents claimed to be entirely unfamiliar with these groups.

Though onerous economic pressures on segments of the local population are a nationwide problem in Jordan, they are particularly acute in densely populated areas and those that have absorbed large numbers of Syrian refugees. As Jordan's second most populated governorate, and that which accommodates the largest number of registered Syrian refugees compared with any other governorate in the country,¹ Irbid is exceptional in this respect. Furthermore, findings revealed strong links between economic strains and VE, with Irbid's most impoverished neighborhoods showing the greatest propensity toward VE. This includes Hanina neighborhood, Turkman neighborhood, Al Barha village, Hashmi street, Fo'ara neighborhood and Taybeh district. A concerning consequence of economic deprivation in these areas is high numbers of idle youths – the primary target for VEO recruiters. Indeed, findings suggested that unemployment and poverty are the main drivers of VEO recruitment, often working in concert with religious motivations. One dimension of this relationship is the development of anti-government grievances among marginalized youth, which VEOs and Salafist Jihadists are perpetuating and exploiting in order to generate support. VE activists achieve this across various platforms including mosques, social media and personal physical interactions. While government security has successfully invested significant resources toward monitoring and intercepting such communication, there is evidence to suggest that it is continuing, albeit to a lesser extent and more surreptitiously.

A major component of VEO communication is the promotion of narratives relating to government neglect, regime illegitimacy and apostasy, the pursuit of an Islamic caliphate, the victimization of Sunni Muslims in Syria and, correspondingly, honorable jihad in Syria. Findings suggest that the resonance of these narratives is amplified when supplemented by religious messaging. Alarming, the majority of respondents perceived elements of the mainstream media, most glaringly Al Jazeera, to be reinforcing some of these narratives – in particular the victimization of Syrian Muslims – while simultaneously strengthening the appeal of VEOs such as ISIS by broadcasting their victories on the battlefield.

The relationship between high numbers of Syrian refugees, economic strain and VE might explain why the majority of respondents associated VE with Syrian refugees, but there were also concerns about direct VE influences passing from Syrian refugees to local youths. These concerns are especially pertinent in sub-locations such as Ramtha, that have absorbed some of the highest numbers of Syrians (mainly from Dara'a) into society (rather than camps) since 2011/2012, and where Syrian refugees were known to have strong kinship ties with the host population. One phenomenon in particular that respondents identified with the spread of VE by Syrian refugees was the proliferation of Syrian-run religious activities.

A number of Irbid's VE hotspots – notably Taybeh district – are also associated with the circulation of weapons and drugs, and the majority of respondents made speculative connections between such criminal activity and VE. The geographical location of these areas is significant, indicating that VE in Irbid is concentrated in the northern and western outskirts of the city center, rather than rural villages or the city center itself. Moreover, a number of Irbid's VE hotspots – such as Hashmi street and Al Barha village – sit in close proximity to Irbid Camp (north of the city center), from the peripheries of which VEO operatives were thought to have been conducting activities. Other locations, most notably Hanina, are also renowned for housing large numbers of Salafist Jihadists.

¹ UNHCR 2016. 'Syrian refugees in Jordan – by locality', UNHCR, July 19, 2016.

2.0 ISLAMIST AND VEO SUPPORT

2.1 SUPPORT FOR VEOs

While Hamas is the most popular VEO in Irbid, JN has a significant following among Salafists and support for ISIS is accelerating among Salafist Jihadists.

The vast majority of locals refused to recognize Hamas as a VEO, and they sympathized with the notion of a legitimate jihad against Israeli Jews. It is largely the latter's fulfillment by Hamas that accounts for the organization's overwhelming popularity. Of the other VEOs in question, Salafist Jihadists, JN and ISIS feature most strongly in the minds of locals – Salafist or otherwise – and have the strongest presence within local communities.² Though neither JN nor ISIS was very popular among the general public, JN received more support than ISIS due to its perceived focus on combatting the Assad regime and defending Syrian Muslims. However, among Salafist Jihadists, ISIS's support base appeared to be surpassing that of JN. This is largely due to the invigoration of the movement's locally prominent "Zarqawi wing" since 2003 and its ensuing alignment with ISIS. It is to this division of the Salafist Jihadist movement that the majority of newly radicalized youth appear to be gravitating, rather than to the original "Maqdisi wing" loyal to JN and Al Qa'ida (AQ). The wider public on the other hand, is strongly opposed to ISIS due to its barbaric methods – notably against women and children – that are regarded as un-Islamic. Furthermore, any credibility that the organization previously had outside the Salafist Jihadist community has been weakened since its immolation of Moath Al Kasasbeh. Meanwhile, such is the increasing association between Salafist Jihadists and ISIS that the former have come to be seen as distinct from, and less popular than, JN. Hezbollah is also unpopular with most residents due to its partnership with the Assad regime and Iranian forces in Syria. Hizb ut-Tahrir is of little significance to the local population, with many claiming never to have heard of the group. Finally, AQ receives little attention, seemingly overshadowed by the prominence of ISIS and JN.

There is strong support for Hamas, which most locals regard as legitimately motivated and non-extremist.

Whether East Bank or West Bank residents, the vast majority of respondents did not recognize Hamas as a VEO. Rather, local opinion considers the group to be a legitimate resistance force and protector – especially of Palestinians – from a near-enemy: Israel.³ Indeed, many respondents were explicitly supportive of a "Palestinian jihad", which was generally deemed a more – if not the only – legitimate struggle in comparison to the war being waged in Syria by groups such as ISIS and JN.⁴ Therefore, unlike attitudes toward ISIS, respondents were highly sympathetic to Hamas' agenda. Furthermore, some respondents underscored the ideological distinctions between Hamas and other VEOs, suggesting that Hamas is primarily politically driven with few, if any, religious motives. Resistance against Israel in the

² "In my opinion, Daesh and Nusra are the most influential groups in Jordan, and in Irbid." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³ "All that Hamas thinks of is to defend Palestine and the right of the Palestinian people in confronting the enemy, the enemy of the entire Islamic and Arab nation, which is Israel. They don't target Arab regimes; their only goal is to liberate Jerusalem from the Zionist enemy." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴ "It's a priority to go to Palestine to fight instead of Syria where you kill other Muslims. In Palestine is the real jihad." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

sense of reclaiming Palestinians' rights, using more or less violent means, was cited by a number of respondents as the chief aim of Hamas and its *raison d'être*. An additional reason why respondents refused to label Hamas a VEO is that they believed its treatment of Israeli prisoners to be reasonable and in accordance with Islamic principles, as opposed to the takfirist practices favored by VEO such as ISIS.⁵ One example of the organization's leniency toward its captives is its treatment of Israeli military prisoner Corporal Gilad Shalit, released in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange.⁶ Several respondents described Hamas as religiously moderate and tolerant, highlighting the fact that it does not impose its beliefs on others,⁷ and that it tolerates the presence of Christian communities.⁸ Likewise, unlike other VEOs, the spread and/or imposition of a particular strain of the Salafist Jihadist ideology was not seen as one of Hamas' objectives among locals.

These high levels of support for Hamas are manifest in public celebrations held in expression of solidarity with the group, such as that in September 2014.⁹ Despite these overarching sentiments, only 37 percent of Irbid Guided Questionnaire (GQ) respondents reported that there is strong or some support, while 50 percent reported that there is strong or some opposition to Hamas in their community (see Figure 2). Thus, qualitative expressions of solidarity with the group may be more reflective of its popularity *relative* to other VEOs rather than its absolute levels of support. Indeed, one respondent did acknowledge that Hamas has exhibited extremist tendencies in the past, specifically in response to the death of an unidentified Palestinian individual.¹⁰ Even more controversially in the local context, another respondent was skeptical of Hamas' motives and legitimacy as a Palestinian resistance organization. He described the group as politically self-interested based on its perceived quest for supreme governance over the Palestinian population.¹¹ This view aligns with criticisms launched against Hamas by prominent Salafist Jihadists such as Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi and Abu Qatada Al Filastini, who have castigated the group for focusing on nationalistic rather than religious goals.¹²

"Hamas is a Palestinian resistance group, and it's the right of my people to demand their land and their rights. They don't assault anyone but they are being assaulted. Hamas is not religiously strict like the other terrorist groups, and it doesn't impose certain orders on people; there are Christians

⁵ "Killing and chopping and distortion are things we don't see from Hamas. They have Israeli prisoners and they deal with them the way religion tells them to." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

⁶ Sherwood, Harriet 2012. 'Gilad Shalit: the real Prisoner of War' The Guardian, May 09, 2012.

⁷ "Hamas is only fighting the Jews in Palestine because they believe in jihad in Palestine, and they don't force people to believe in their ideology in Gaza." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁸ "In Gaza there are a lot of Christians and no one hurts them. Hamas deals with their situation politically." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁹ Saif Al Din Bakir 2014. 'Al Alaf fi Irbid: Kolna Hamas...Kolna Mukawima [Thousands of us: we are all Hamas...we are all the resistance]', Al Sabeel, September 05, 2014.

¹⁰ "Maybe one incident in the history of Hamas was super extremist - when one Palestinian civilian was dead." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

¹¹ "I don't believe that Hamas is really a resistance movement and that is because there are many Palestinians who are against Hamas - they do not feel that Hamas is working in the interest of the Palestinian people. They [Hamas] do not do anything for the benefit or interest of the Palestinian society; they only want to gain authority and to be in government." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹² Hegghammer, Thomas 2013. 'Abdallah Azzam and Palestine', Welt des Islams 53: 353-387.

in Gaza, and Hamas did arrest people with Daesh more than once, and executed them because they distort religion. Hamas follows the interpretation of the Qur'an the correct way, because its only goal is to liberate its country. It doesn't have a terrorist or political goal, it is just resistance and a people's right; its religion is moderate."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

JN enjoys greater levels of popularity than ISIS primarily based on its role in the Syrian conflict.

Of the prominent VEOs engaged in the Syrian conflict, JN was the most popular among Irbid's residents, who represent a significant proportion of Jordan's Salafist followers.¹³ According to one respondent's estimate, around 350 locals have joined the organization from northern Irbid alone, many, if not most of them, recruited and trained by Salafists.¹⁴ Incidentally, this figure matches past claims by Mohammad Al Tahawi of his own recruitment records of Jordanian jihadists bound for Syria.¹⁵ There are numerous reasons to account for JN's relative popularity in Irbid. First, JN, along with ISIS, has established itself as one of the most prominent Sunni Islamist VEOs active in Syria,¹⁶ where much of the focus is directed among the local population – Salafist or otherwise. Second, there is a widespread perception that JN's principle motive is combatting the Syrian regime,¹⁷ which is widely, though not entirely vilified in Irbid (see section 6.1 Perceived Impact of Foreign Relations). Consistent with its perceived focus on combatting the Syrian regime is the group's stated prioritization of the local, rather than distant, struggle.¹⁸ This is contrasted with ISIS's focus on territorial gain, and its broader regional and international agenda. Third, and contributing to this reputation, JN is proving itself as the main, and the most successful group in combating the Assad regime. This is evident in its territorial victories against the regime, perhaps most notably its capture of Idlib City in March 2015.¹⁹ Fourth, the group has demonstrated a willingness and capability to collaborate with other anti-Assad factions in Syria (including the FSA),²⁰ often in a leading role, thus expanding the group's accessibility. Fifth, the group is comprised predominantly of Syrians (as opposed to the large numbers of foreign recruits fighting with ISIS),

¹³ Rumman, Mohammad Abu 2014. 'I am a Salafi: a study of the actual and realized identities of Salafis', Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014.

¹⁴ "I think around 350 people went [to join JN] from my area from the north. Salafism had a role and they [Salafists] used to recruit people. They train them easily. My father's cousin made his son go and the next day he was killed...there is a relation between Nusra and Salafism." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

¹⁵ Pelham, Nicolas 2013. 'Jordan's Syria problem', The New York Review of Books, January 10, 2013.

¹⁶ Abbas, Yasir 2016. 'Another "state" of hate: Al Nusra's quest to establish an Islamic emirate in the Levant', Hudson Institute, April 29, 2016.

¹⁷ "For the Nusra Front, all of its concentration and targeting is on the fight against the Syrian regime, so that's why they receive support and compassion from the people." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

¹⁸ Abbas, Yasir 2016. 'Another "state" of hate: Al Nusra's quest to establish an Islamic emirate in the Levant', Hudson Institute, April 29, 2016.

¹⁹ Cafarella, Jennifer 2015. 'Assad regime loses Idlib to Jabhat Al-Nusra and rebel offensive', Institute for the Study of War, March 31, 2015.

²⁰ Wood, Josh 2016. 'Syrian opposition groups divided over Jabhat Al Nusra', The National, April 04, 2016.

reinforcing its image as a representative of local interests.²¹ Sixth, JN has established a connection with the population of Irbid and the wider Jordanian public through its accommodation of a significant number of Jordanian foreign fighters, many of whom have occupied high positions within the organization. This includes Al Zarqawi's brother, Iyad Al Toubasi a.k.a. Abu Gelebebe, and Abdul Latif a.k.a. Abu Anas Al Sahaba,²² as well as Sami Mahmoud Al Oraidi, JN's main Sharia authority and second in command.²³ The group's advances in neighboring Dara'a, including its capture of the border crossing with Ramtha itself in September 2013,²⁴ potentially accelerated the rate of recruitment from Irbid.

The idea that JN is a legitimate fighting force against the Syrian regime is perpetuated through popular media including the news, social media and YouTube. One respondent confirmed this despite reports that JN receives relatively little media exposure (see section 7.2 The Role of the Media).²⁵ Moreover, media coverage of the Syrian regime's brutality toward JN fighters serves to strengthen sympathy for the group. Indeed, for several respondents, JN represents a legitimate army rather than a terrorist outfit,²⁶ and the group is generally classified as less tyrannical than ISIS because it does not impose religion on others or punish public resistance to the same extent. Accordingly, for many local residents, JN fighters are worthy of martyr status unlike those fighting with ISIS.²⁷ Consistent with this belief is the perception among respondents that most foreign fighters from Irbid choose JN over other VEOs.²⁸

"The incidents are just videos of battles that we see on YouTube and on social media. We see how Al Nusra Front are fighting the Syrian regime, and at the same time we see what happens when the Syrian regime captures people from Al Nusra, how they torture them. This increases the compassion for the Al Nusra Front."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²¹ Williams, Lauren 2015. 'Analysis: Nusra Front cements its place in Syria', Middle East Eye, April 30, 2015.

²² Alami, Mona 2014. 'The new generation of Jordanian jihadi fighters', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 18, 2014.

²³ Counter Extremism Project, 'Sami Al-Oraidi', accessed July 23 2016. Available at: <<http://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/sami-al-oraidi>>

²⁴ Roggio, Bill 2013. 'Al Nusrah Front, Free Syrian Army seize border crossing to Jordan', The Long War Journal, September 29, 2013.

²⁵ "[JN is] supported by the media because they are the front line against the Syrian regime, and are always on the news." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁶ "He does not fight with them [JN] but he believes in them though I told him they are terrorists. But he said no, they are not; they are fighting Bashar [Al Assad] and his government. This guy lives in Irbid and studies in Yarmouk University." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

²⁷ "Most of them say that the one who joined Daesh isn't a martyr, but the ones who joined Al Nusra are." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

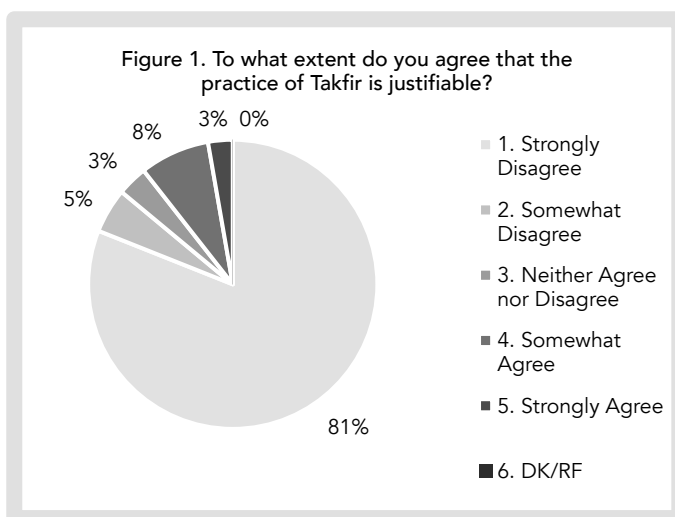
²⁸ "I think that most people here go to Al Nusra because I see the numbers." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

JN's ideological affinity with the Salafist Jihadist old guard, but ostensible rejection of takfirist ideology, has played into its favor.

Another significant factor accounting for JN's popularity is likely to be its historical association with AQ,²⁹ and its ideological affinity with the traditional Salafist Jihadist current, which is considered to have an exceptionally well-established presence in Irbid.³⁰ Among the main ideological bonds between the two groups – manifest in their shared connections to AQ – is the promotion of Sharia law and the pursuit of an Islamic caliphate. Furthermore, in line with AQ's principles, JN doctrine maintains the belief that these goals should be implemented incrementally and non-coercively in order to secure public support.³¹ ISIS on the other hand has demonstrated little patience for this approach. Instead, and to the disapproval of the Salafist Jihadist old guard including Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi, Abu Qatada Al Filastini and Ayman Al Zawahiri,³² it has shown a preference for imposing its ideological order with socially disruptive haste. Also contrary to ISIS, JN's eschewal of Takfir is a point of admiration for its local followers.

Quantitative findings supported this, with 86 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreeing, while only 11 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that the practice of Takfir is justifiable (see Figure 1). Meanwhile, the consistent support that JN has received from some of Jordan's most prominent Salafist Jihadists – Al Maqdisi, Abu Qatada and Abu Sayyaf – will have strengthened the organization's appeal among locals.³³ One such local was Anwar Abu Faris from Irbid City, who joined JN early on in the Syrian conflict before being killed in Dara'a in February 2015. Due to his leadership role within JN, locals in Irbid refer to him with the nickname, Abu Mukhtar.

Another example is the 22 year-old Anas Barakat, who left Irbid to join JN in Syria in 2012 before being killed in February 2014.



²⁹ Abbas, Yasir 2016. 'Another "state" of hate: Al Nusra's quest to establish an Islamic emirate in the Levant', Hudson Institute, April 29, 2016.

³⁰ Al Sharif, Osama 2016. 'As external threats recede, Jordan left to face inner demons', Al Monitor, June 16 2016.

³¹ Counter Extremism Project. 'Nusra Front', Accessed July 20 2016. Available at: <<http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/nusra-front>>.

³² Malik, Shiv, Mustafa Khalili, Spencer Ackerman and Ali Younis 2015. 'How ISIS crippled al-Qaida', The Guardian, June 10, 2015.

³³ Diez, Alberto Caballero 2016. 'Jordanian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq: how did they become radicalized and how they can be de-radicalized', Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, July 07, 2016.

JN faces criticism for its supposed ulterior motives beyond combatting Assad.

The positive views of JN outlined above were not universally held across the governorate. Several respondents were critical of JN, and traced the shift in local attitudes toward the group to residents' awareness of its increasing violence and ulterior motives. While previously JN was admired for its religious legitimacy and its stance against the Assad regime, some locals have become repelled by its territorial objectives.³⁴ This is not least because JN has pursued this agenda at the expense of Muslim civilians.³⁵ One example is the group's April 2016 bombardment of government-held areas in northern Aleppo.³⁶ Similarly, some of the group's activities in Idlib governorate have prompted religious leaders in the area to condemn the group on the grounds that it is seeking gains at the expense of the Syrian revolutionary cause.³⁷ For some, JN's offenses date further back. For example, one respondent held the organization responsible for initiating the 2011 Syrian uprising and inflaming the ensuing conflict, accusing it of uprooting civilians as it sought to destroy the country.³⁸ Correspondingly, there were indications that these changing perceptions of the group might explain why some locals have become increasingly disenchanted with it. Indeed, only 12 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some support, while 73 percent reported that there is strong or some opposition to JN in their community. Surprisingly, nine percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that they had not heard of JN (see Figure 2). Regardless of their relative support or rejection of JN, the majority of respondents recognized a conflict between this organization and ISIS over leadership, support and geographical control in Syria.³⁹ The announcement in July 2016 by JN leader Abu Mohammad Al Jolani,⁴⁰ that the group was distancing itself from AQ and rebranding itself "Jabhat Fateh Al Sham" is likely to have mixed implications for its support in Irbid. For those Salafist Jihadists that have backed JN based on its association with AQ, their support for the group may wane, and by extension that of their followers as well. However, the group's reinforced emphasis on its revolutionary commitments, as implied alongside its departure from AQ,⁴¹ has the potential to boost its support among ordinary citizens and the wider Salafist community in Irbid.

³⁴ "As for Al Nusra [Front], in the beginning they represented religion, or they appeared to the people to represent religion correctly. Then the battle between them and the other parties became a battle to force control and authority on land." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁵ "I don't know who Al Nusra is fighting. Everyone says that they are fighting terrorism but what I am witnessing is that they are killing Muslim civilians and children in Syria." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁶ Middle East Eye & agencies 2016. 'Civilians killed as rebels shell government-held areas of Aleppo', Middle East Eye, April 25, 2016.

³⁷ Lister, Charles 2016. 'Jabhat al-Nusra oversteps mark with Idlib crackdown', The Middle East Institute, March 14, 2016.

³⁸ "I think that Al Nusra has betrayed their own state: Syria. They are Syrians who betrayed their land and took the rights of the people, forcing them to flee from Syria." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁹ "Some people see ISIS and Al Nusra as one because they have the same beliefs, though they differ politically because Al Nusra and ISIS both want to be the leader - that's when they clash." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴⁰ Chulov, Martin 2016. 'Al-Nusra Front cuts ties with al-Qaida and renames itself', The Guardian, July 28, 2016.

⁴¹ Uhammedm 2016. 'Jabhat al-Nusra leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani announced the disengagement with al-Qaeda', YouTube, July 28, 2016.

"When he [a JN fighter] returned to Jordan he joined Daesh, but how and why I don't know. Did Al Nusra abandon him, or did a Daesh member manage to recruit him?...In the beginning, the Al Nusra Front was considered the only resistance movement against the regime, and everybody loved it because it fought the regime. But after that the goal is to kill people and control land. The group was different at the beginning...they were right and now they are wrong."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

With general agreement that ISIS is exceptionally violent and extreme, opposition to the VEO is widespread.

Though views vary on whether JN and AQ constitute VEOs, respondents invariably recognized ISIS as such. This outlook is largely based on ISIS's glaring indiscriminate violence, targeting government personnel and installations and Muslims throughout the Arab world beyond - and even before - a single enemy such as the West or Jews.⁴² For one respondent, this reflects the group's objective to destroy the entire Arab world.⁴³ Another respondent, though regarding AQ and JN as non-extreme, asserted that ISIS, with its aspirations to topple all the Arab regimes, is 80 percent 'extreme'. Other respondents' revulsion against ISIS was based on the organization's abuse of Islam, which they regarded as detrimental to the religion's reputation.⁴⁴ For example, locals condemn the organization's killing and displacement of civilians as un-Islamic, a perception that is supported by numerous Jordanian Islamic figureheads,⁴⁵ most notoriously Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi and Abu Qatada.⁴⁶ To stress this point, one respondent referred to a Hadith, claiming that the Prophet Mohammad had forewarned of the emergence of a group resembling ISIS.⁴⁷ One such Hadith, and perhaps that being alluded to here, is the following:

⁴² "ISIS is focusing on Arabs and Muslims, and they did not kill any foreigner or even a Jew." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁴³ "I think Daesh seeks to destroy the Arab world, not only Syria, and the indication of this is that they have entered Jordan." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴⁴ "As for Daesh, it is considered a global killing organization. It distorts the Islamic religion, and it is a plan to destroy the Arab countries and destroy religion. There are a lot of global wars; Hitler burned and killed people, but Daesh burned and decapitated heads, and burned them alive in different ways. It doesn't have anything to do with religion at all." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴⁵ "Daesh does a lot of anti-Islamic things, like killing and displacing people, and killing women. It did a lot of things wrong. Most of the people ran from them. There are a lot of Islamic preachers who went out against them. An Islamic preacher said that these Daesh members don't belong to Islam." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴⁶ Malik, Shiv, Mustafa Khalili, Spencer Ackerman and Ali Younis 2015. 'How ISIS crippled al-Qaida', The Guardian, June 10, 2015.

⁴⁷ "As for Daesh, they are criminals. They should not exist. All that they do and the killings which they commit do not represent Islam in any way...The prophet has said in his teachings, that a people will come and they will claim that they are representing Islam, and that they will justify killing. He described the way they will dress and their actions." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

"In the latter days, there will be people who say they are the best of peoples, will recite the Holy Qur'an but it will not go down their throats. They will leave the fold of Islam like an arrow leaves the bow, never to return. If you ever find them, kill them, because you will be rewarded on Judgment Day for doing so."

For another respondent, so distant is ISIS's methodology from Islamic values that they disassociate the organization from Salafism altogether. Similarly, the same respondent rejected any relationship between ISIS and Salafism on the basis that the latter is an Arab Muslim concept whereas ISIS is regarded as a foreign, non-Muslim entity.⁴⁸ However, this extent of hostility toward ISIS has not been constant; the organization's apparent battle against the Assad regime generated a significant boost in local approval during the first years of the Syrian conflict. A key turning point was the organization's execution of Moath Al Kasasbeh, after which ISIS's local reputation sunk.⁴⁹ Consequently, ISIS's support base in Irbid was reportedly scant, and was dwarfed by the numbers of citizens opposing the organization.⁵⁰ This was revealed in quantitative findings, with 92 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reporting that there is strong or some opposition, while only 4 percent reported that there is strong or some support for ISIS in their community (see Figure 2). An empirical indication of local rejection of ISIS is the refusal of Samad's (south-west of Al Husn, Irbid) tribes to allow the body of one of the dead suspects from the March 2016 raid on an alleged ISIS cell to be buried in the village's cemetery.⁵¹

"I don't think people in Irbid support ISIS because they know they are terrorists and they have no relation to Islam, and what they do is wrong. How can they be Muslims and kill Muslims as well...Not so many people from Jordan join ISIS. They know they are wrong and that they don't represent Islam, and they are terrorists. Jordanians are educated. They don't want to risk their lives to rule Syria."

(Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

Particularly among the "Zarqawi wing" of the Salafist Jihadist current, there exist pockets of support for ISIS, which is deemed more powerful than other VEOs.

While the general population might overwhelmingly reject ISIS, there are indications that among local Salafist Jihadists specifically, loyalties are shifting from JN to ISIS. This is partly reflected in the stance taken by Irbid's most prominent Salafist Jihadists: Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi, Omar Mahdi Al Zaydan (brother of slain Al Qa'ida member Mahmoud Mahdi Al Zaydan),⁵² and Saad Al Hunayti. Having formerly

⁴⁸ "I don't think there's a relation between ISIS and Salafism because ISIS uses the name of Islam though most of them are not Arabs or Muslim. But Salafists are Muslims. They understand religion differently." (Female, 20 Activist, Irbid)

⁴⁹ "Before the burning of Moath Al Kasasbeh, some people used to accept this and say that the person who went is a martyr, and that he is fighting against Bashar's regime. But after they saw ISIS killing randomly and inhumanely, they knew that this is not martyrdom and it is the wrong group." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

⁵⁰ "With regard to the presence of Daesh sympathizers in Irbid, I don't think that there is a large percentage at all: it's less than low - no more than two-three percent." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁵¹ Omari, Raed 2016. 'Slain terrorist denied burial in home village', The Jordan Times, March 05, 2016.

⁵² The National 2010. 'Jordanian militant dies in Pakistan's tribal region', The National, January 13, 2010.

campaigned for JN, by October 2014 each of these individuals had given bay'a (a pledge of allegiance) to ISIS instead.⁵³ Support for ISIS has been on the rise since the organization established itself as a formidable fighting force through its numerous victories in Iraq and Syria, most notably its capture of Mosul in June 2014.⁵⁴ The organization's seizure of Al Bukamal (Deir Ezzor governorate) and Raqqa from JN in 2014 will have also strengthened ISIS's reputation vis-à-vis that of JN,⁵⁵ and may have influenced the allegiance shifts among local Salafist Jihadists. Moreover, based on one respondent's speculation, there are indications that some residents are sympathetic to the notion that ISIS constitutes a liberation organization.⁵⁶ Another noteworthy dimension to the shifting allegiances among Irbid's Salafist Jihadists is the division between the movement's old generation – largely remaining steadfast in their support for JN – and the new generation of pro-ISIS "Zarqawists" – who have a large representation in Irbid.⁵⁷ Furthermore, given that the Salafist Jihadist current is inherently opposed to secular governance,⁵⁸ the state's co-opting of members from the Salafist Jihadist old guard – namely Abu Qatada and Al Maqdisi – is thought to have accelerated defections to the movement's pro-ISIS "Zarqawi wing".⁵⁹ Significantly, one respondent also pointed out that ISIS is the most active and vocal in its local recruitment campaigns compared with other VEOs – including JN – whose supporters appear to be more reserved.⁶⁰

"Some people joined ISIS now because they see them as powerful. Some think that Al Nusra are mellower and that ISIS is stronger. You have to have a strong motive to join ISIS."

(Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

ISIS sympathizers have been publicly vocal in their support for the organization, contributing to the perception that it has a strong local presence.

Residents have displayed their solidarity with ISIS publicly in a number of ways. After ISIS murdered Moath Al Kasasbeh for example, some locals within Irbid Qasabah district publicly announced their approval.⁶¹ On another occasion in 2012, after a local youth who had joined ISIS carried out a suicide

⁵³ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, May 18, 2015: 41-71, 120.

⁵⁴ Weiss, Michael & Hassan Hassan 2015. ISIS: Inside the army of terror. New York: Regan Arts.

⁵⁵ Abbas, Yasir 2016. 'Another "state" of hate: Al Nusra's quest to establish an Islamic emirate in the Levant', Hudson Institute, April 29, 2016.

⁵⁶ "Maybe ISIS originally were Syrians who came to life after the revolution started in order to fight Bashar [Al Assad]." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁵⁷ Batal al-Shishani, Murad 2009. 'Al-Zarqawi's legacy seen in trial of Jordanian al-Qaeda cell', The Jamestown Foundation, February 06, 2009.

⁵⁸ Rumman, Mohammad Abu 2014. I am a Salafi: a study of the actual and realized identities of Salafis, Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

⁵⁹ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology May 18, 2015: 41-71, 120.

⁶⁰ "I have not heard of any supporters of Al Nusra or the FSA in Jordan. I think Daesh are the most influential and play the largest role in luring and recruiting Jordanian youths." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁶¹ "When Kasasbeh was burned, some people in my village felt happy and they announced that in the village." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

bombing in Mosul, his family and several residents from the Al Shamali area (Hanina neighborhood, Irbid Qasabah) celebrated his “martyrdom” by distributing sweets to their neighbors.⁶² The latter is just one of several local “martyrs weddings” (see also section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives). ISIS followers have also demonstrated their support by waving ISIS flags and singing jihadi songs at local weddings.⁶³ Certain incidents have exposed these supporters as especially boisterous. For example, in 2014, seven men were arrested in Irbid for carrying ISIS flags in their vehicle after having attracted attention by firing celebratory gunshots at a wedding.⁶⁴ If the GID assertion that the local March 2016 raid was targeting a conspiring ISIS sleeper cell is legitimate,⁶⁵ it is possible that more immediately threatening elements of ISIS support may be residing in Irbid. According to one respondent, evidence has emerged to suggest that the cell targeted by the aforementioned raid was comprised exclusively of locals with Palestinian origins.⁶⁶ Whether this is a credible verdict or not, it might reflect a general association made by the public between ISIS and West Bankers.

“Daesh is the most influential. We don’t hear about Al Nusra. Daesh is more present, and its goal is to kill people. I think those that go to Syria and carry out such acts are all supporters of Daesh. There is a lot of attention on Daesh - more than Al Nusra - and they can recruit more people. I don’t know if Al Nusra have entered Jordan; it’s possible that they have, but less than Daesh.”

(Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

Views on AQ are divided, but support for the VEO has diminished in light of its historical links to ISIS.

Several respondents were either forthright in their approval of AQ or indicated a degree of sympathy toward the organization.⁶⁷ These endorsements were justified largely on the grounds that AQ targets legitimate enemies – such as the West - rather than Muslim civilians.⁶⁸ For example, one respondent praised the group’s resistance against “true infidels”, including its role in Afghanistan and supposed historical struggle against the Syrian regime.⁶⁹ Indeed, AQ’s historical significance appears to

⁶² “In my village they see them as heroes. When the boy blew himself up in Mosul, people here celebrated and gave sweets to others.” (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁶³ The Daily Star Lebanon 2015. ‘Jordan sentences six for waving ISIS flags at wedding’, The Daily Star Lebanon, April 13 2015; Arabia Weddings 2014. ‘Jordan” 11 arrested at wedding for carrying ISIS flags’, Arabia Weddings, December 26 2014; Arabia Weddings 2014. ‘Jordan: Man arrested for holding Daesh-ISIS’s flag at wedding’, Arabia Weddings, September 12, 2014.

⁶⁴ Luck, Taylor 2014. ‘Jordan: Four imams banned for pro-Islamic State Friday Sermons’, The Muslim Times, October 22,, 2014.

⁶⁵ BBC News 2016. ‘Jordan raid: eight killed in Irbid as forces “foil IS plot”’, BBC News, March 02, 2016.

⁶⁶ “In the operation that happened in Irbid, the interrogation revealed that the terrorists were Jordanians originally from Palestine.” (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

⁶⁷ “I supported Bin Laden and I still do. Al Qa’ida are not extremists because they only fought the Americans - the American regime and government only.” (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁶⁸ “They [AQ] did not fight Arabs or Muslims but they want to fight the west and occupy countries like Russia and the US.” (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁶⁹ “Al-Qa’ida has history against the Syrian government.” (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

considerably strengthen its legitimacy among certain locals, with one respondent eulogizing its former leaders and precursors.⁷⁰ Additionally, perceptions that the organization employs a more inclusive approach – compared with ISIS’S takfirist policies – account for some of AQ’s appeal. The preservation of this image of AQ among locals owes itself partly to a lack of information about the group’s activities. One respondent for example, claimed to only recently have learned that AQ was responsible for the 2005 Amman hotel bombings.⁷¹ Another respondent even questioned the validity of the idea that AQ was responsible for the 2005 Amman hotel bombings and 9/11.⁷² Furthermore, several respondents emphasized AQ’s moderation in relation to other VEOs such as ISIS and JN.⁷³ However, other respondents expressed an increasing disenchantment with AQ following its widely recognized association with ISIS. For example, one understood AQ to have engendered ISIS, and explained that while AQ’s presence has typically been geographically remote, ISIS posed a much more localized threat. Thus, some respondents drew distinctions between AQ and ISIS, describing the latter as more extreme and more powerful than the former. However, this does not preclude acknowledgement by some locals that AQ is a formidable VEO.⁷⁴ For instance, despite the group’s perceived moderation in relation to ISIS, some respondents disapproved of AQ’s attacks against civilians, including 9/11 and the 2005 Amman hotel bombings. For these individuals, though they considered their views regionally atypical of their communities in relation to 9/11, such acts are un-Islamic.⁷⁵ It was these negative viewpoints that prevailed in quantitative findings, as 77 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some opposition, while 10 percent reported that there is strong or some support for AQ in their community (see Figure 2). Surprisingly, nine percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that they had not heard of AQ.

“What is meant by Al Qa’ida is the mother and founder of ISIS...The leaders of Al Qa’ida are present in faraway places from the society and the Arab countries, and the events that happen away from the Jordanian Society let us see matters in a different way. But because ISIS reached to each one of us, it started to feel like this is extremism, and we started to talk about ISIS in a clear picture.

⁷⁰ “Osama Bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam and Ibn Omar: those people fought Russia and they liberated Afghanistan. And at the same time they don’t think like ISIS. They don’t say that everyone is an infidel.” (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁷¹ “As for the explosions that happened in the hotels in Amman many years ago: I didn’t know that Al Qa’ida were responsible for that incident until very recently.” (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁷² “With regard to Al Qa’ida, it had a large role prior to the Syrian conflict. The US renounced it as a terrorist organization, but with regard to Jordan we have not seen it play a terrorist role. Al Qa’ida was practicing jihad in Iraq against the Americans; it was not fighting or killing Iraqi civilians. Al Qa’ida was accused of the incident of the twin towers in the US, but nobody actually knows who carried out the bombings.” (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁷³ “Al Qa’ida is way less brutal than Al Nusra.” (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁷⁴ “As for Al Qa’ida, I also consider them the biggest terrorist group in the region.” (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁷⁵ “As for Al Qa’ida, it is the most tempered group. Most of its operations are against Americans, not Arabs. But it does have stories with Arabs, like when it sent Sajida [Al Rishawi] to bomb Jordan. Because Jordan is a Muslim country, this is considered extremism and terrorism. There is nothing in Islam that makes you kill a person. But when they hit the trade towers in America, I’m sure that there wasn’t any Arab who wasn’t happy, because America is the biggest country and controls the world. But in these towers there were Muslims and Palestinians and civilians. Islam didn’t order us to kill civilians; if you want to fight, fight a soldier and not a civilian.” (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

It then started to look shady for Al Qa'ida."

(Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

Salafist Jihadists have a visible presence in Irbid and are increasingly confrontational, though their advocacy for jihad in Syria is religiously illegitimate according to many locals.

The presence of Salafist Jihadists has long been acknowledged in Irbid since the movement's inception in the 1990s. However, until the 2003 Invasion of Iraq,⁷⁶ the movement was somewhat dormant.⁷⁷ This inactivity may explain why a significant 10 percent of Irbid GQ respondents had not heard of Salafist Jihadists (see Figure 2). However, whether as a result of AQ's mobilization in Iraq, ISIS's growing influence, the stimulus of the Syrian conflict or an alternative explanation, the movement has displayed a spurt in confidence and resolve since 2003 and especially since 2011.⁷⁸ For most respondents and several commentators,⁷⁹ the influence of Syrian extremists crossing into Irbid since the beginning of the Syrian conflict has been a major factor in this respect.⁸⁰ Respondents claimed that the movement's reanimation is discernible in the increasingly aggressive and socially intrusive approach that has come to define Salafist Jihadists in recent years. Along with this physical stimulation, the movement's ideological principles are also attracting greater attention. This greater exposure of Salafist Jihadists is partly due to leaders within the movement becoming increasingly vocal and politically engaged. For instance, a series of street demonstrations by the movement in 2011 – including in Irbid (April 2011) – saw its followers wielding swords and engaging in violent clashes with security forces.⁸¹ Furthermore, key figureheads from the movement have delivered numerous public lectures, such as its founder, Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi, who was even afforded a public television appearance.⁸² In addition, heated debates from within the Salafist Jihadist movement between the "Zarqawists" and the "Maqdisi wing" – especially since the JN-ISIS split in April 2013 –⁸³ have commanded increasing media attention. Among certain elements of Irbid's population, this is proving damaging to the reputation of the movement and drawing disapproval from residents. For instance, consistent with the generally accepted idea that "true jihad" is exclusively in Palestine, several respondents criticized the Salafist Jihadist movement for encouraging locals to support VEOs in Syria. This, they claimed, is a false interpretation of jihad that renders the group

⁷⁶ Al Sharif, Osama 2016. 'Jordan and the challenge of Salafi Jihadists', Middle East Institute, March 21, 2016.

⁷⁷ "Previously the Salafists had a very limited role, they were not mentionable. [But] now they have a larger role." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁷⁸ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, March 12, 2015: 41-71, 120.

⁷⁹ Jordan Correspondent 2016. 'Has IS established foothold in Jordan?', Al Monitor, March 09, 2016.

⁸⁰ "Radicalism has been present in Jordan for a long time. But they [extremists] were not active previously. The Arab revolutions made it visible and I believe many Jordanians who joined these groups were affected by the Syrians because those Jordanians were living here for a long time and only became radical after the Syrians came here." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁸¹ Batal al-Shishani, Murad 2011. 'Jordan's new generation of Salafi-Jihadists taking to the streets to demand rule by Shari'a', The Jamestown Foundation, May 05, 2011.

⁸² Al Roya TV 2015. 'Interview with Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi', Al Roya TV, February 06, 2015.

⁸³ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, March 12, 2015: 41-71, 120.

misrepresentative of Islam.⁸⁴ Accordingly, only six percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some support, while 76 percent reported that there is strong or some opposition to Salafist Jihadists in their community (see Figure 2). It is significant however, that among certain cohorts, the movement's revitalization and, to an extent, renovation is attracting a new wave of support. For instance, the movement's revival coincided with a growing fissure between the "Zarqawists" and the "Maqdisi wing", with the former – now represented by Irbid resident Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi - beginning to surpass the latter at least in its appeal to the younger generations of Salafist Jihadists.⁸⁵ Indeed, that quantitative findings on support for Salafist Jihadists correlated more closely with those for ISIS than relatively higher levels of support for JN may be reflective of the growing influence of "Zarqawists" within the movement and thus its increasing association with ISIS. At the same time as a more violent - and perhaps more inclusive - wing of the Salafist Jihadist movement has surfaced, and for similar reasons, ISIS has established itself among regional VEOs and begun to dominate the media, simultaneously attracting significant global support and international recruits. Considering that the Salafist Jihadist movement has long served as a gateway to VEOs,⁸⁶ it is likely that the "Zarqawi wing", having aligned itself with ISIS, is absorbing the stream of ISIS followers seeking to either join or associate themselves with the organization.

"Now the Salafists [Salafist Jihadists] are in a new age. They have people focusing on them because of these groups...the Salafists [Salafist Jihadists] have really changed nowadays. Previously they were not blasphemous; they used to think like any other individual. But they are now more violent; when someone disagrees with them they resort to violence very clearly."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Viewed as an Iranian and Syrian regime ally exacerbating the flow of Syrian refugees into local communities, Hezbollah receives low levels of support.

On a number of issues, Hezbollah is aligned with Jordan's Salafist Jihadist movement and has the potential to appeal to locals in the same way. This includes the organization's determination to combat Israel, as well as its strong opposition to the US and thus its denunciation of Jordan's collaboration with US forces in the region.⁸⁷ That these two points are among Hezbollah's principal motives has been evident in events within Jordan. The most prominent of these is probably the 2015 conviction of eight individuals on terror charges. The charges included recruiting for Hezbollah and planning terrorist attacks (since 2006) on the Israeli embassy in Amman and US troops in eastern Jordan among other targets.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ "Salafist Jihadists are not on the right path; they say they want jihad in Syria, but they go to Syria to kill Muslims who are not occupied. Jihad is only against the Jews - those that occupy Arab lands." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁸⁵ Jordan Correspondent 2016. 'Has IS established foothold in Jordan?', Al Monitor, March 09, 2016.

⁸⁶ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, March 12, 2015: 41-71, 120.

⁸⁷ Halaby, Jamal J. 2015. 'Jordan convicts eight Hezbollah suspects on terror charges', The Arab Weekly, August 07, 2015.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

However, at least among the wider population in Irbid, Hezbollah's anti-Israeli and anti-US principles fail to generate significant levels of support. This was reflected in quantitative findings: 83 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some opposition, while only nine percent reported that there is strong or some support for Hezbollah in their community (see Figure 2). This overwhelming rejection of the group indicates that the organization's unpopular cooperation with the Assad regime, Russia and Iran trumps its more popular anti-Israeli behavior. This is in addition to its well-documented atrocities toward Syrian civilians, such as its role in the 2015-2016 siege of Madaya.⁸⁹ Hezbollah's activities in Syria have particular relevance for Irbid – and more specifically Ramtha district – where there are strong kinship ties with the population of Dara'a (see section 5.2 Religious Values, Attitudes and Beliefs). For example, Hezbollah's advances within Dara'a, such as its role in the January 2016 capture of the town of Sheikh Miskin,⁹⁰ have aggravated local perceptions of the group. Furthermore, Hezbollah's military victories in southern Syria are equated with increasing flows of refugees to Jordan,⁹¹ which many equated with deteriorating living standards socio-economic grievances (see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt). Aside from these factors, there are indications that the Salafist Jihadist community has demonized Hezbollah to boost its own support and that of other VEOs. For example, in 2013, the Jordan's Salafist Jihadist leader, Abu Sayyaf, announced that combatting Hezbollah was a top priority for JN, and urged his followers to realize their duty in waging jihad against Hezbollah.⁹²

Unknown to many, Hizb ut-Tahrir is unpopular despite its non-violent activism and condemnation of ISIS.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has received very low levels of public exposure in Jordan compared with other VEOs such as ISIS and JN. Accordingly, a significant proportion of locals are entirely unaware of the existence of Hizb ut-Tahrir, with 16 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reporting that they had not heard of the organization (see Figure 2). In addition to its lack of media exposure, Hizb ut-Tahrir's less vigorous and intrusive self-promotion, and its preference for a grass-roots strategy of expansion,⁹³ may also account somewhat for its anonymity among elements of the public. However, the group's methodology has allowed for several displays of social activism, including within Irbid. For instance, in May 2015 the organization participated in a demonstration to mark the fall of the Ottoman Empire, gathering outside Yarmouk University Mosque after Friday Prayer.⁹⁴ Similarly, in July 2014, the organization organized rallies in Amman, Zarqa, Tafiela and Irbid campaigning for military support for Palestinians in Gaza.⁹⁵ A more regular venue for the group's activities in Irbid is Saddam Hussein Mosque located on Al Husn Mainstreet (Irbid Qasabah). Those locals who are familiar with Hizb ut-Tahrir were overwhelmingly opposed to it. As quantitative

⁸⁹ Tamimi, Azzam 2016. 'Madaya: a huge concentration camp where Hezbollah starves people to death', Middle East Eye, January 07, 2016.

⁹⁰ Al Haj Ali, Abo Bakr 2016. 'Russian bombs, rebel rifts and the fall of a key Syrian town', Middle East Eye, January 27, 2016.

⁹¹ Al Sharif, Osama 2016. 'Why the fall of this Syrian city raises red flags in Jordan', Al Monitor, February 08, 2016.

⁹² Al Samadi, Tamer 2013. Jordanian Salafist leader urges supporters to fight Hezbollah', Al Monitor, June 03, 2013.

⁹³ World Almanac of Islamism 2013. 'Hizb ut-Tahrir', World Almanac of Islamism, October 07, 2013.

⁹⁴ Editorial 2015. 'Hizb ut-Tahrir Wilayah Jordan protests on the 94th anniversary of the abolition of Khilafah', The Khilafah, May 15, 2015.

⁹⁵ Editorial 2014. 'By the praise of Allah, Hizb ut-Tahrir's demonstrations in Jordan for Gaza were successful', The Khilafah, July 27, 2014.

findings showed, 59 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some opposition, while 16 percent reported that there is strong or some support for Hizb ut-Tahrir in their community (see Figure 2). Given the organization's espousal of many popular issues shared by other VEOs – rejection of the US, opposition to Israel, support for an Islamic caliphate and an emphasis on the unjust victimization of Muslims – and its denunciation of ISIS and professed eschewal of violence,⁹⁶ its lack of credibility among locals may be surprising. However, the group's reputation is likely to have been damaged by the government's outlawing of the organization, which has a history of government provocation. This includes its encouragement of the 1968 and 1969 failed military coups,⁹⁷ and attempts in 2014 by some of its members to question the justification of amendments the country's anti-terrorism law.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Counter Extremism Project 2016. 'Report: Hizb ut-Tahrir', Accessed September 01, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hizb-ut-tahrir>>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Luck, Taylor 2014. 'Members of banned party referred to court after "attempting to discuss Anti-terrorism Law" with MPs', The Jordan Times, March 31, 2014.

2.2 SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL AND NON-VIOLENT ISLAMIST GROUPS

Non-violent Islamist groups constitute a potential, but not certain, gateway to VEOs.

The majority of respondents held the view that the MB and local Salafist Quietists are ideologically consistent with VEOs such as ISIS and JN.⁹⁹ However, when discussing these groups' methodologies and allegiances, distinctions emerged. For example, one respondent – referring to the suspected AQ member, Awni Al Mansi, who is the subject of rumors relating to VEO recruitment in Irbid - implied that while Salafists actively support VEOs including ISIS, the MB, despite sharing Salafist ideologies, is opposed to ISIS.¹⁰⁰ A few other respondents shared this opinion, contending that though the MB is ideologically consistent with VEOs, it objects to their violent pursuits and is more politically oriented. This is manifest in many of the organization's largely peaceful street demonstrations, such as that against the removal of fuel subsidies in November 2012,¹⁰¹ the January 2014 protests calling for political reform and an end to government corruption,¹⁰² and the anti-Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty demonstrations in October 2015.¹⁰³ Several respondents also highlighted the non-violent nature of MB activism,¹⁰⁴ and accordingly, the vast majority of respondents generally disassociated the MB from terrorism.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, several respondents distinguished between Salafist Quietists and Salafist Jihadists, stressing that the former are more tolerant and less religiously intrusive than the latter.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, they emphasized that Salafist Quietists have a much narrower definition of the "enemy" – namely Jews – than do Salafist Jihadists, whose considerable demonstration of support for ISIS and its takfirist policies reflects this (See section 2.1 Support for VEOs). Meanwhile, the majority of respondents recognized the opportunity and potential for VEOs to exploit non-violent Islamist groups, appealing to their membership through ideological affinity. Thus, much depends on the ability of extremists to manipulate non-violent Islamists, the relative vulnerability of these targeted individuals, and the ability and commitment of non-violent Islamist groups to insulate their members from VEOs.

⁹⁹ "There are no peaceful Islamic groups. And they are all a gateway because they all have the same ideology and they only differ in minor things like who to follow and holding a flag with Allahu Akbar. Even the Muslim Brotherhood is part of them." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

¹⁰⁰ "Salafism has 99 percent members who support or work with radical groups. The evidence for this is what happened recently in Irbid with Al Mansi before the Syrian conflict. They worked with ISIS because they believe in their ideology...As for the Muslim Brotherhood, they are a gateway for the same ideology but they don't have the same power and it's not for their own good to do as ISIS does or to support them because they represent the population" (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

¹⁰¹ Al Khalidi, Suleiman 2012. 'Protests erupt in Jordan after fuel prices rise', Reuters, November 14, 2012.

¹⁰² Petra 2014. 'Protesters call for reform, fighting corruption', The Jordan Times, June 14, 2014.

¹⁰³ The New Arab 2015. 'Jordanians call for end to peace treaty with Israel', The New Arab, October 16, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ "I saw a demonstration by the Muslim brotherhood once but they were chanting normally about religion: "there is no god but Allah". They were not being violent; after the demonstration they all go to their homes." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁰⁵ "As for the Muslim brotherhood, I think they are all about politics. Sometimes they conduct protests, but I don't think they have anything to do with destruction, violence, or terrorism." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁰⁶ "Salafists [Salafist Quietists] are not radical because they want peace in the country; they only tell people what's right and wrong, and they don't force them. They only want to spread religion and they [accept that] people are free to believe what they want, whether they agree or disagree with them." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

A minority of respondents was less sympathetic toward non-violent Islamist groups, including the MB. These critics blamed such groups for encouraging extremist tendencies, spreading VE ideologies, inciting violent anti-government activism and encouraging jihad in Syria.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, one respondent implied that the MB's failure to convincingly distinguish itself from the Salafist Jihadist current was dangerously deceptive to the general population.¹⁰⁸ For some, the notion that the MB is an extremist threat serving as a potential gateway to VEOs is an emergent, rather than fixed perception.¹⁰⁹ This is perhaps in light of the growing tensions between the MB and the government that culminated in the forced closure of several MB centers across the country, including in Irbid in April 2016,¹¹⁰ as well as the arrest of dozens of MB members in 2014.¹¹¹ One of those arrested was the organization's leader, Zaki Bani Rashid,¹¹² who breached Jordan's amended anti-terrorism laws when he publicly criticized the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"Honestly, there is a difference in this. I can say that they can be a gateway or a barrier; it depends on the person. A lot of people who joined the Brotherhood went later to Al Nusra and Daesh, and there are people who joined the Muslim Brotherhood but remained with them. Some left them and went to Zamzam, which is a split from the Muslim Brotherhood according to their principles. So it depends on one's beliefs and influences, but I can say it is close to 30 percent that it can serve as a gateway to these extremist groups."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

The weakening of non-violent Islamist groups such as the MB is benefitting VEOs.

For the same reasons that they might be gateways to VEOs, non-violent Islamist groups also represent potential barriers to VEOs. Several respondents acknowledged this with reference to the MB, disassociating the movement from jihadism and anti-regime violence. They noted that for those with Salafist sympathies, the MB provides a more moderate space in which to practice their beliefs; as is

¹⁰⁷ "Personally, I think that the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists are 100 percent responsible for extremism and sabotage. I don't like them and I don't sympathize with them. When demonstrations happen, these groups are always present and incite people against the country and the government...I see that they are very violent with people, they impose their opinions and point of view and they are very strict. They think that they are the only real Muslims and that everyone who's not in the Brotherhood is not a Muslim. This is wrong. They convince young people to commit acts of violence and extremism for their own benefit; they convince them to perform terrorist attacks inside and outside Jordan and they motivate them to go fight in Syria." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁰⁸ "In general, people in Jordan are very simple. They do not distinguish between Salafist Jihadists and Salafist Quietists or the Brotherhood [MB]. For the general population they consider all these groups to be the Muslim Brotherhood - they dress the same, whether they are women or men." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁰⁹ "I think previously the Brotherhood [MB] did not have any extremist objective in Jordan. However, nowadays there are...things that are driving them and ordering them to extremism in Jordan." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

¹¹⁰ Islamic Movements Studies Program 2016. 'Muslim Brotherhood struggling to survive in Jordan', The Regional Center for Strategic Studies', April 27, 2016.

¹¹¹ Schwedler, Jillian 2015. 'Jordan: the quiescent opposition', Wilson Center, August 27, 2015.

¹¹² Sweis, Rana F. 2014. 'Jordan arrests Muslim Brotherhood official over criticism of United Arab Emirates', The New York Times, November 21, 2014.

widely appreciated, were the MB not to exist, VEOs might be the only alternative.¹¹³ Indeed, in the past, King Abdullah has realized the benefit of using the MB as a means of taming more threatening politically oriented Islamists.¹¹⁴ For some locals too the MB and its political wing, the IAF, are highly valuable and commendable. For instance, their public denunciation of VEOs as un-Islamic terrorists has been well received.¹¹⁵ This has occurred on numerous occasions. For example, after ISIS's immolation of Moath Al Kasasbeh, the IAF announced its disapproval of the act,¹¹⁶ which was appreciated by members of the public.¹¹⁷ Additionally, the MB condemned the June 2016 Ruqban attack (Mafraq) - claimed by ISIS - as 'cowardly' and 'criminal'.¹¹⁸ More generally, the MB reportedly teaches local youth that ISIS is unrepresentative of Islam, and it counters ISIS's Islamic interpretations such as its definition of jihad: according to the MB, true jihad is in Palestine, not Syria.¹¹⁹ Thus, though potentially stoking anti-Israeli attitudes, the MB is discouraging local participation in the Syrian conflict with groups such as ISIS. Moreover, there are indications that the MB as an entity constitutes an inherent threat to ISIS, which dedicated the main feature of the April 2016 issue of its online magazine - *Dabiq* - to a theological invective against the movement.¹²⁰

Another way in which the MB exhibits its relative Islamic moderation is that does not appear to proselytize to the extent of Salafist Jihadists, limiting most of its lecturing to within its own institutions.¹²¹ This includes the MB's numerous centers in Irbid, of which there were over 100 until the government shut them down in 2016. Additionally, the MB reportedly organizes sports and cultural events for local youth, countering the social isolation and dissatisfaction that may increase susceptibility to VEOs (see section 3.1 Education and Employment). This includes summer vacation courses for children with Qur'anic memorization activities, swimming classes and field trips across Jordan. The importance of such activities is magnified in areas associated with VE, such as Irbid Qasabah and Irbid Camp, and areas renowned for their socio-economic neglect such as Al Husn Camp - all locations where the organization's following is concentrated. The group's other main activities in Irbid include Palestine-oriented events such as those in memory of the Nakba (exodus of Palestinians during the 1948 war) and those relating to Al Aqsa Mosque, the distribution of food packages to the poor during Ramadan, the provision of university grants for

¹¹³ Bondokji, Neven 2015. 'The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan: time to reform', Brookings Institution, April 2015.

¹¹⁴ Terrill, Andrew 2010. *Global Security Watch: Jordan*. California, Colorado & Oxford: Praeger. 2010.

¹¹⁵ "They [the MB] say publicly that they [VEOs] are extremist groups and terrorists, and have nothing to do with Islam." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

¹¹⁶ Middle East Monitor 2015. 'Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood condemns pilot execution', MEMO, February 04, 2015.

¹¹⁷ "The Muslim Brotherhood didn't have a role in extremism, especially when Moath Al Kasasbeh was martyred: the Muslim Brotherhood denounced what Daesh did, their sheikhs even cried over him." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹¹⁸ The Jordan Times 2016. 'World condemns terror attack on Jordan's border', The Jordan Times, June 22, 2016.

¹¹⁹ "I know people among the Muslim Brotherhood personally. Their religiousness is normal and far from that of Daesh. They don't even like Daesh, as they advise youth that what Daesh is doing is wrong, and that it is not permissible, and is far from religion. They also clarify what jihad is by studying and working with parents: true jihad is in Palestine against the Jews. As for Syria, the one who fights doesn't know if the one in front of him is a Muslim or not. The thinking of the Brotherhood [MB] is totally far from extremism, and they don't have anything to do with terrorism." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹²⁰ Dabiq 2016. 'The Murtadd Brotherhood', Dabiq, Issue 14, April 13, 2016.

¹²¹ "They [the MB] only give lectures, and mainly these occur in their main headquarters." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

talented but poor youths, and financial support for widows. It is for these social contributions that several respondents considered the recent weakening of the MB as cause for concern, as it may prove conducive to VEO gains. This includes the 2016 closure of MB offices and centers in Ramtha and central Irbid by Jordanian security forces.¹²² Meanwhile, one respondent implied that the MB is unpopular among older, more educated youths, such as university students.¹²³ It is noteworthy however, that other respondents singled out this particular cohort as being among the most susceptible to VEO recruitment (See 3.1 Education and Employment), thus reaffirming the notion that the MB constitutes a potential barrier to VE. Local Salafist Jihadists have detected the gains to be had from eroding the credibility of less extreme religious influences like the MB, IAF and Salafist Quietists, actively seeking to facilitate the latter's decline. For example, the former Irbid resident Saad Al Hunayti has publicly denounced Jordan's moderate Salafist movement, accusing it of loyalty to the Jordanian regime, America and Israel.¹²⁴ On the other hand, the weakening of particular moderate Islamist organizations may only inaugurate the growth of other such groups. To an extent, the MB has evidenced this, as its deterioration has coincided with internal divisions rather than existential collapse. For example, many MB members who have resigned from their positions have simply defected to one of the two newly established alternative MB branches: the Zamzam Initiative (established in 2012/2013) and the MB Society (established in 2015).¹²⁵

"It [the VE influence] will be faster and easier because the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and in the region as a whole is weaker now. It doesn't have an organization as powerful as before. It had an organization scheme, like following orders - "Ta'aa" it calls it - and it would play on this a lot. It would organize youth groups and create sports events or cultural seminars or something like that...I always supported it because it represented a wide spectrum of society and was very organized at the time. But now it got a lot weaker and the extremist groups managed to take members from it because of its internal and structural weakness."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Salafist Quietists employ a peaceful approach but have little public influence despite their social persistence.

Like other Islamist groups in Irbid, the Salafist Quietist movement is actively engaged in publicly promoting its Islamic interpretations and principles. Respondents were not particularly aware of the movement's values, but suggested that it adopts a peaceful method, urging followers to pursue discussion rather than violence.¹²⁶ Aside from preaching at regular prayer times, Salafist Quietists provide

¹²² The New Arab 2016. 'Jordan shuts down more Muslim Brotherhood Offices', The New Arab, April 15, 2016.

¹²³ "Even the Muslim Brotherhood who are in the universities do not have a mentionable role. Most students do not like them." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹²⁴ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. 'Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria', Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, March 12, 2015: 41-71, 120.

¹²⁵ Fanack Chronicle 2016. 'Muslim Brotherhood: once Jordan's most organized party, now three groups at daggers drawn', Fanack Chronicle, April 06, 2016.

¹²⁶ "I think they [Salafist Quietists] spread Islam and inform people how to pray and how to practice the faith using a verbal approach – [they are] not extremist or terrorist." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

special 10-20 minute post-prayer classes in mosques for those members of the public willing to attend. In an attempt to increase attendance to these classes, which are encouraged by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Salafist Quietists advertise them in local mosques, neighborhoods, and even people's homes. In doing so, they are known to target older youths more than younger ones.¹²⁷ It is also across villages, more than in cities, that the movement actively promotes its principles in an effort to influence public attitudes. Typical messages advanced by the organization relate to the four pillars of Islam and generally remain apolitical. They also eschew the topic of jihad. However, one central prescription by the group is that locals should exercise resilience against foreign influences.¹²⁸ Given the significant foreign element in the structure of several VEOs – especially ISIS – such messages render the group a potential barrier to VE. However, respondents suggested that despite these advertising campaigns, few people are persuaded, and the majority seek to avoid Salafist Quietist activists if possible.¹²⁹ This may explain why locals have little knowledge about the movement and its values. For example, 10 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that they had not heard of Salafist Quietists (see Figure 2). Meanwhile, those who were familiar with the movement overwhelmingly objected to it: 64 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some opposition, while 17 percent reported that there is strong or some support for Salafist Quietists in their community (see Figure 2). One explanation for the movement's unpopularity could be that many respondents failed to distinguish between Salafist Quietists and Salafist Jihadists. Thus, they may have conflated the two groups' ideologies and activities, with the Salafist Jihadists dragging down the reputation of Salafist Quietists. Another explanation may be that movement's persistent community campaigning is rendering it a societal nuisance.

"With regard to Salafist Quietists, I do not deal with them, and I do not see them being driven to extremism. They only try and preach religion in their own way, but they do not use any threats or violence at all to do so."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

While appealing to Irbid's large West Bank population, the IAF is increasingly alienating its East Bank supporters.

As the MB's official political arm, the IAF receives comparable attention to its mother-organization in terms of local approval and criticism. Largely due to its charitable activities and commitment to supporting Hamas, the organization has its largest following among lower class urban populations and

¹²⁷ "These groups don't only target young youths but older youths as well - especially the Quietists." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹²⁸ "Most of the activities of the Salafist Quietists revolve around the act of "Khoroj" [Stemming from the acts of the Khawarij or "the outsiders"]. This is especially the case in the villages, in some mosques, and calling people to attend religious lessons, which they provide in the mosque. But most people do not respond and do not attend." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹²⁹ "The Salafists Quietists: they don't only go to mosques and villages, but to people's homes [in order] to invite them to their lessons that they conduct in mosques. But in my opinion, people are not really convinced to take them up on their invitations; people go to the mosque to pray. People in the villages have even become aware and do not mix with them." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

West Bank residents. Thus, Irbid, a highly urbanized and economically disadvantaged governorate with a significant proportion of West Bank residents, is a potential stronghold for the IAF,¹³⁰ as it has traditionally been for the MB.¹³¹ Furthermore, while the IAF has historically enjoyed support from both East Bankers and West Bankers, the scales are increasingly tilting toward the latter. This trend has coincided with the ascendancy of the IAF's "hawkish" faction, which has steered the organization's focus increasingly in the direction of the Palestinian cause and amplified its support for Hamas.¹³² For example, in 2011, the organization staged multiple street demonstrations calling for the government to repeal the Israeli peace treaty.¹³³ Additionally, in September 2015, the group staged a number of rallies in Irbid relating to Israeli violations of Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque.¹³⁴ Accordingly, there is a growing sense of alienation among the East Banker constituent of the IAF support-base, which has consequently been weakening.¹³⁵ To some extent, this was manifest in conversations with respondents; while none dedicated much time to discussing the IAF, there was little indication of significant enthusiasm for the organization. In fact, the only respondent who did explicitly praise the IAF was unsurprisingly a West Bank youth. This was perhaps a reflection of not only the IAF's sustained appeal to Irbid's West Bank population, but also its active youth engagement. For instance, the organization fosters a politically active youth wing that is allegedly popular - at least compared with other political parties - within Irbid's Yarmouk University and the Jordan University of Science and Technology.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, the IAF's waning popularity across the governorate was evident in quantitative findings: 55 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some opposition, while 29 percent reported that there is strong or some support for the IAF in their community (see Figure 2). Perhaps indicative of the organization's instability and ideological fluctuation, a notable minority of 11 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is neutrality toward the IAF in their community

"I want to talk about positive aspects. I know a lot of youth that belong to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front. They are cultured and aware and realize what is right or wrong and [the difference between] being strict and violent, and righteous Islam."

(Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

¹³⁰ Althbutat, Dr. Qasem & Dr. Nermin Ghawanmeh 2014. 'The position of the Islamic Action Front of the political process in the period (1993-2013) in Jordan', Research on Humanities and Social Sciences 4 (9): 180-185, 2014.

¹³¹ Amis, Jacob 2012. 'The Jordanian Brotherhood in the Arab Spring', Hudson Institute, December 27, 2012.

¹³² Schenker, David & Gavi Barnhard 2015. 'The implosion of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood', The Washington Institute, May 11, 2015.

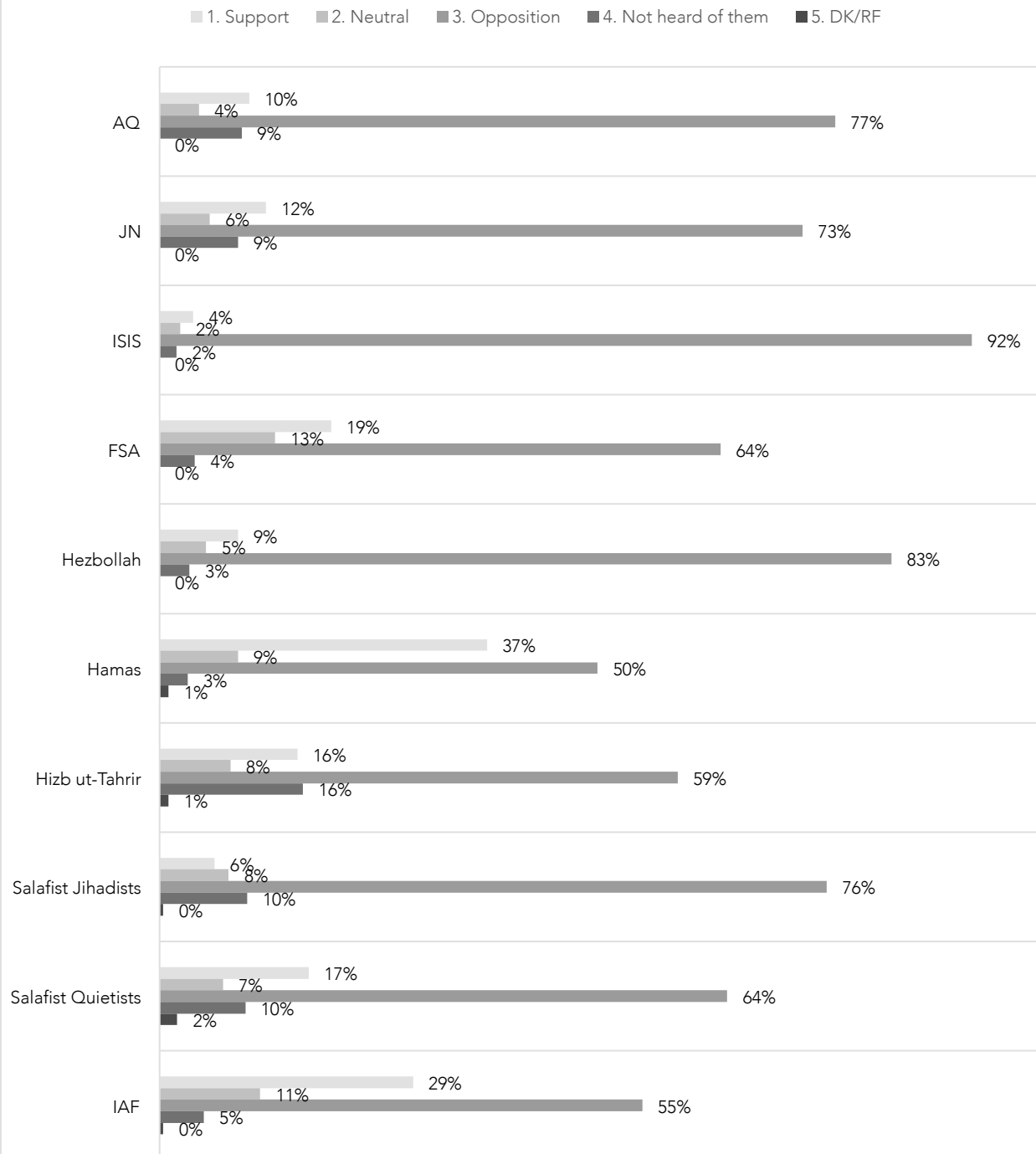
¹³³ Schwedler, Jillian 2015. 'Jordan: the quiescent opposition', Wilson Center, August 27, 2015.

¹³⁴ The Jordan Times 2015. 'King makes extensive contacts in defence of Jerusalem's holy sites', The Jordan Times, September 16, 2015.

¹³⁵ Schenker, David 2013. 'Down and out in Amman: the rise and fall of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood', The Washington Institute, October 02, 2013.

¹³⁶ Greenfield, Danya 2013. 'Jordan's youth: avenues for activism', Atlantic Council: Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, August 2013.

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

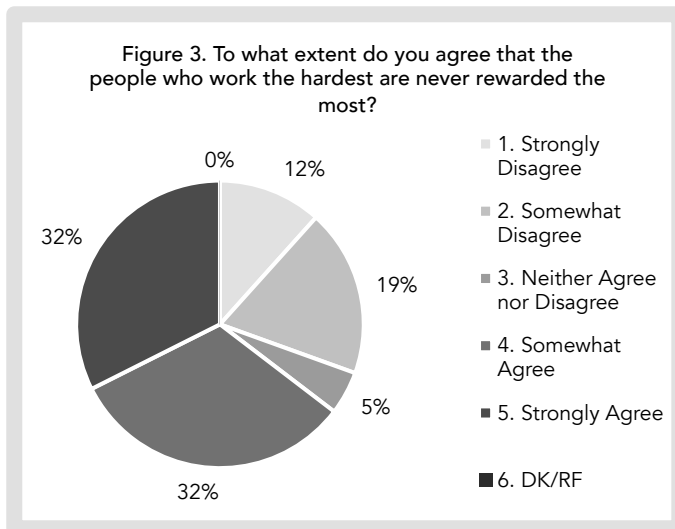


3.0 BASIC NEEDS DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

3.1 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

University students and graduates are deemed especially susceptible to violent extremist influences.

Whether based on evidence or not, many respondents identified universities in Irbid as key sites where extremist groups are effectively channeling their ideologies and gaining loyalty from impressionable students. A potential factor accounting for the success of this approach is the growth in university intolerance to student political engagement. The obstacles to university political activities are manifold, including regulations in most universities that forbid political activities in students' clubs, intrusive security procedures - including student interrogations relating to political activities - regulations that limit access to students' clubs and disciplinary regulations that prevent students from distributing leaflets.¹³⁷ Added to this is a worry among the parents of students that their children's political engagement may lead to suspension from university. These fears are not unfounded: Irbid's Yarmouk University has implemented many of the aforementioned regulations, with some of its students having been suspended for circulating politically oriented leaflets.¹³⁸ Such political intolerance risks leaving many students frustrated and eager for alternative political outlets - particularly those channeling grievances against repressive social structures, such as those cultivated by VEOs. Indeed, many respondents confirmed the strong link between students and VEOs,¹³⁹ and one respondent discussed local dynamics that support the notion of violent extremists capitalizing on student resentment toward the state. He explained that several of the suspects involved in the March 2016 Irbid raid were nurturing anti-government grievances and appealing to local university students.¹⁴⁰ The political vacuum among youth is being confronted to some extent by the IAF, which has fostered a politically engaged



¹³⁷ Hussainy, Muhammed 2012. 'Policy Paper: Increasing democratic political engagement among university students in Jordan', Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, December 2012.

¹³⁸ Al Natour, Ezz Eldeen 2015. 'In Jordan, students say university freedom is moving backwards', Al-Fanar Media, August 01, 2015.

¹³⁹ "Most of them are students who join the extremist groups." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

¹⁴⁰ "They [the March 2016 Irbid raid suspects] were anti-government because the government didn't rule by God's book. Also they managed to reach people like [those from] our college in our university." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

youth wing that is reportedly active within universities.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, several respondents identified University street – close to Yarmouk University - in central Irbid as one of the most at-risk locations in terms of VE, not least because it accommodates a culture of delinquency and lacks ethnic and socio-cultural cohesion.¹⁴² However, this link appears to be more speculative than factual, founded on rumors rather than hard evidence. Additionally, more detailed reports suggest that it is residential areas behind University street, rather than the main street itself, which accommodate anti-social behavior.

One respondent claimed that universities are cultivating negative socio-cultural environments in terms of substance abuse, and by extension VE propensity.¹⁴³ (For more on the relationship between substance abuse and VE, see section 5.3 Exposure to Crime and Conflict.) Indeed, other respondents agreed that university networks – such as those established in dormitories – provide fertile territory for the transmission of VE, and maintained that the majority of those who join extremist groups are either students or recent graduates. The latter are especially vulnerable to VE when they encounter obstacles to their professional ambitions and seek alternative livelihoods (see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt) or an outlet for their grievances (see section 7.1 The Role of Violent Extremism Propaganda). While some are willing to endure employment for which they are over-qualified,¹⁴⁴ others may turn toward VEOs instead, in order to evade the social stigma attached to low-paid vocational work.¹⁴⁵ Several respondents decried this local “culture of shame” relating to low-skilled jobs such as street cleaning, which is associated with low pay (150 Jordanian Dinar (JD) per month), long hours (05:00-17:00) and dire conditions – street cleaners must work through the elements including intense heat. It is mainly Irbid’s Egyptian population that undertakes this work. A second example is construction work, which is associated with uneducated employees earning 15 to 20 JD per day, as well as a lack of work during winter months. A final example of what locals perceive to be dishonorable work is restaurant service, which is considered the preserve of the working class. Several respondents claimed that the “culture of shame” associated with these jobs deters university graduates from undertaking employment that does not correlate with their level of education, with many choosing to remain idle instead. However, the government also receives much of the blame for its failure to provide sufficient high-skilled opportunities

¹⁴¹ Greenfield, Danya 2013. ‘Jordan’s youth: avenues for activism’, Atlantic Council: Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, August 2013.

¹⁴² “It [VE] could be possible also in University street because most of it is rented furnished apartments, and it’s not known who resides in it - like Syrians and Saudis and other university students. They have the largest population after the camp. But I’ve never heard about terrorism incidents since I got out of University street. But they could be initiated from there in the future because it has a lot of wrong things like drugs and other things.” (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁴³ “As for universities, I don’t think they can be a hub for terrorist organizations, but places for doing immoral things like taking drugs...it is also possible to recruit those that do take drugs because they do not understand religion.” (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁴⁴ “I know many young people who study at university and work as cleaning men, and this is great. Some of them also work as waiters in restaurants and coffee shops. This is much better than sabotage and terrorism.” (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁴⁵ United Nations Development Programme 2014. ‘Labour market: the case of vocational training in Jordan’, UNDP, May 2014.

for Irbid's many graduates.¹⁴⁶ Among the most popular professions for young male graduates in Irbid are government positions. Meanwhile, less educated men from areas such as Kafer Soum village (Irbid Qasabah), Taybeh district, Kharja village (Bani Kenanah district), Saal village (Irbid Qasabah) and Bushra village (Irbid Qasabah) dream of jobs in the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and the GID, where the benefits include health insurance. NGOs are also popular professional destinations for Irbid's young population. Aside from providing insufficient employment opportunities, there is a sense that the state is not doing enough to recompense hard working individuals in less prestigious areas of employment. For example, 64 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 31 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the people who work the hardest are never rewarded the most (see Figure 3).

The realization that VEOs and Salafist Jihadists are exploiting students and idle graduates has led to calls for universities to do more to counter VE in the area. For example, several respondents advocated for student participation in political seminars and awareness conferences in universities as a way of reinforcing young people's resilience to extremist influences.¹⁴⁷ To a limited extent, these requests have been heeded. For example, the initiative (launched in February 2013) by the Al Hayat Center for Civil Society Development entitled "My Citizenship My Participation" is aimed at increasing political awareness in local youth through Yarmouk University (located on Shafiq Irshidat street, south of the city center) and Al Balqa Applied University in Al Hikmah neighborhood.¹⁴⁸

"We need to raise the awareness of youths to make them steer away from the culture of shame. Even if they have a university education, they can earn a wage by working in anything legitimate - it is better than sitting around doing nothing. We really need to rid ourselves of this culture of shame, because many youths finish their university studies and do not accept any simple jobs."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

Schools may be providing the foundations for extremist thought, but most respondents are satisfied with local education services.

Concerns that the national school curricula are encouraging religious extremism and intolerance are countrywide.¹⁴⁹ For example, there are substantiated claims that school textbooks provide "jihad studies",¹⁵⁰ and that Islamic Education textbooks portray jihad as a personal duty that will be rewarded by

¹⁴⁶ "We can blame the government for not providing job opportunities for young people who graduated from university and do nothing." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁴⁷ "The government should force universities to hold political seminars to enable political participation, to provide political freedom and create political interests. And they should hold seminars that take them away from extremism through the political parties that they belong to." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

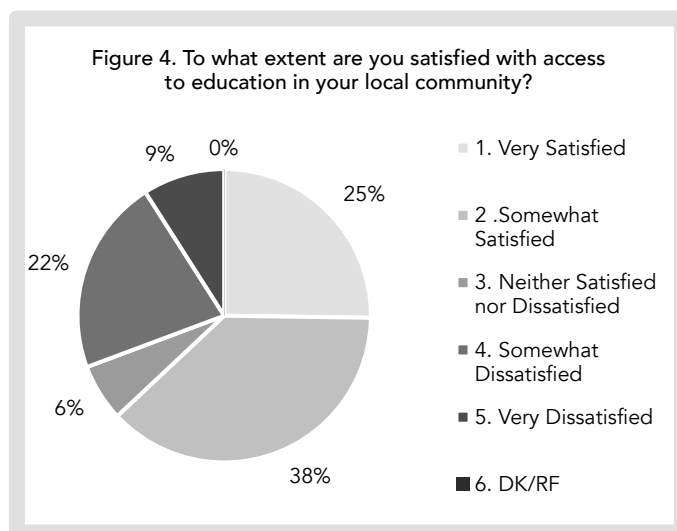
¹⁴⁸ Al Hayat Center for Civil Society Development, accessed July 13, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.hayatcenter.org/projects/civic-education-for-schools-and-university-students-%E2%80%9Cmy-citizenship-my-participation%E2%80%9D/>>

¹⁴⁹ Harel Z. 2015. 'In light of Jordanians joining terrorist organizations, calls in Jordan to reform curricula', The Middle East Media Research Institute, December 14, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Allah.¹⁵¹ It is noteworthy however, that these claims do not address the precise definition of jihad as presented in the curricula. Other examples include books that prescribe the death penalty (by stoning) for adulterers and teach that nationalism is detrimental to Islam.¹⁵²

Based on local circumstances, Irbid is likely to be a prominent case in this matter. First, appeals to reform the national school system have met strong opposition from Islamist groups,¹⁵³ who have an exceptionally strong presence in Irbid. For example, the governorate is a traditional hub for the Jordanian MB.¹⁵⁴ Second, a significant obstacle to education reform for teachers is that of the pressure engendered by oversized classes.¹⁵⁵ This factor creates time and resource constraints, leaving little opportunity for teacher re-training and lesson re-design. It may also lend itself to a traditional didactic teaching method that is efficient but not conducive to critical thinking.¹⁵⁶ Due to its disproportionately high share of Syrian refugees, Irbid is one of the most overstretched of Jordan's governorates in terms of school capacity,¹⁵⁷ rendering it exceptionally vulnerable to these logistical constraints. Several respondents recognized this, complaining specifically about the negative influence of the religious education curriculum and local teaching staff. Accordingly, there were appeals for schools to not only weed out extremist material from their curricula, but also to actively contribute toward Counter Violent Extremism (CVE), which the current education system is reportedly neglecting to do.¹⁵⁸ In fact, the Ministry of Education has responded to such criticisms by redesigning elementary school textbooks to promote religious diversity, cultural tolerance and tone down Islamic references. For example, pictures of churches are included alongside those of mosques, various Hadiths and Qur'anic verses have been removed and illustrations of veiled women have



¹⁵¹ Al Arabiya 2015. 'Jordan tries to stem ISIS-style extremism in schools, mosques', Al Arabiya, August 08, 2015.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Harel Z. 2015. 'In light of Jordanians joining terrorist organizations, calls in Jordan to reform curricula', The Middle East Media Research Institute, December 14, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Amis, Jacob 2012. 'The Jordanian Brotherhood in the Arab Spring', Hudson Institute, December 27, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Al Jarrah, Fatima Nasser Khalifeh & Hala Yousef Abdelrahman Khasawneh 2013. 'Problems faced by primary school teachers in Irbid governorate as perceived by the school administrators', European Scientific Journal 9 (7): 166-184.

¹⁵⁶ Al Emam, Dana 2015. 'Creative, critical thinking encouraged in Jordanian schools', The Jordan Times, October 09, 2015.

¹⁵⁷ "Schools now operate on two shifts and hours have become fewer - you can see 50 kids in one class." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

¹⁵⁸ "Our history books mention the lineage of the King, and the actions of the army, and the Arab revolt. But they don't talk about extremism and terrorism at all; they are not concerned with the topic of terrorism because we didn't have this issue before." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

been replaced with unveiled women.¹⁵⁹ Despite the concerns outlined here, the majority of residents are generally positive about the local education situation: 63 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported being very or somewhat satisfied, while 31 percent reported being very or somewhat dissatisfied with access to education in their local community (see Figure 4).

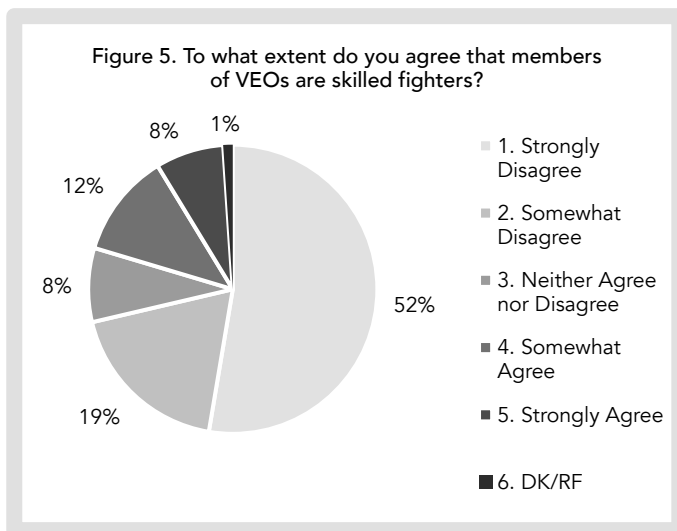
"We need to update our religious curriculum because we are not currently providing our children with the correct religious education. Even if the curriculum was correct, our teachers do not educate our students about religion in the right way. So we need to train our teachers first, and then work on our curriculums."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

VEOs prefer to recruit more educated youth, but uneducated individuals are equally vulnerable.

For a number of reasons, VEOs have displayed a preference for recruiting educated youth over uneducated youth in Irbid. First, though it may appear obvious that uneducated youths are easier to manipulate and indoctrinate, respondents claimed that they are also less ambitious than educated youths. Therefore, they may be less likely to be self-motivated toward achieving the aspirations contained within Salafist Jihadist ideology. At the same time, VEOs recognize that educated youths are potentially more useful due to their presumed superior capabilities and capacity for learning martial skills.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, respondents indicated that VEOs prefer to target well-connected and

influential individuals rather than more solitary locals, as this increases the potential to produce a chain of recruits. Broader secondary research supports this finding, with evidence that VEO recruiters operating across Jordan are better rewarded for employing well-educated individuals with skills and networks.¹⁶¹ Despite these findings, respondents indicated that there is not necessarily a correlation between education and extremism,¹⁶² and there is minimal confidence among locals in the capabilities of VEO fighters. For example, 71 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 20 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that members of VEOs are skilled fighters (see Figure 5). In fact,



¹⁵⁹ Al Sharif, Osama 2016. 'Row erupts in Jordan over school curricula changes', Al Monitor, September 21, 2016.

¹⁶⁰ "They always look for educated people, who can be of use to them in developing killing methods or weapons, or in educating other recruits." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁶¹ Mercy Corps 2015. From Jordan to Jihad: The lure of Syria's violent extremist groups.

¹⁶² "There are uneducated people in these groups, and there are educated ones like doctors, and some are of average education levels. So education doesn't affect it [violent extremist tendencies]." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

education is likely to strengthen the resilience of youth against any manipulative rhetoric advanced by VEO recruiters. Several respondents supported this notion, asserting that those most vulnerable to VE in their community are uneducated youth - both male and female.¹⁶³ This is especially true of those brought up in austere religious families and - particularly in the few cases of females - withdrawn from school at an early age.¹⁶⁴

"Extremist groups like to attract educated ones more than non-educated ones, especially if their economic and financial situation is bad. This is because the educated ones would be of more use, and especially because the educated ones are looking for a better future unlike the uneducated ones who want to work and provide for their family."

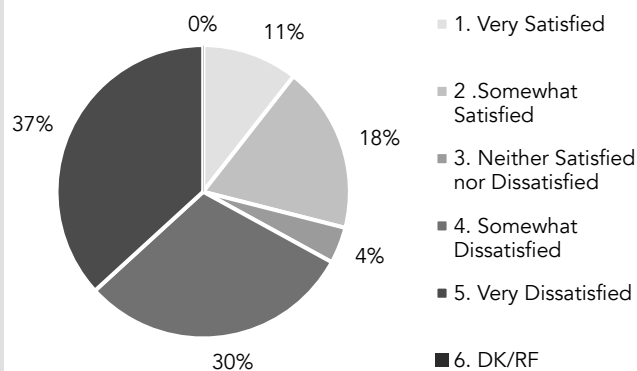
(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

Unemployment and youth inactivity is proving conducive to increasing VE.

Especially since the onset of the Syrian conflict, Irbid's economy has declined rapidly, and at 18.5 percent in the first quarter of 2016 one survey judged it to have the highest unemployment rate of all Jordan's governorates at the time of writing.¹⁶⁵ This was not lost on local residents: a striking 67 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported being very or somewhat dissatisfied, while 29 percent reported being very or somewhat satisfied with employment opportunities in their local community (see Figure 6). A perceptible consequence of this is that there are large numbers of youths experiencing high levels of boredom and inactivity.¹⁶⁶

Quantitative findings supported this observation: 65 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 21 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that lots of bored youths is a problem in their community (see Figure 7). Several

Figure 6. To what extent are you satisfied with employment opportunities in your local community?



¹⁶³ "In my opinion both the educated and uneducated people go [to join VEOs in Syria]. But the majority of them are uneducated because they are not aware about these issues. So they are victims, and they are more easily lured by these groups." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁶⁴ "The second problem is that extremism is violence against women and children because women are then not allowed to complete their studies. I know a girl who has a Salafist father. She scored 87 at Tawjihi and I scored around 60. She couldn't complete her studies but I did. They forced her to marry at a young age and cover her face, though she doesn't even pray." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

¹⁶⁵ Jordan Labour Watch 2016. 'Increase in unemployment rate during the first quarter of 2016'. Jordan Labour Watch, April 26, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ "In Jordan, the lack of opportunities for jobs - this causes people to become bored, and hence begin to think of anything to spend their time on." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

respondents suggested that this is playing into the hands of VEOs, which offer these youths – especially males – a sense of purpose and meaning, and the prospect of elevated status through recruitment and participation.¹⁶⁷ In scouting for these vulnerable youths, Salafist Jihadists are thought to target local cafés where idle males can be found whiling away their time.¹⁶⁸ Though not necessarily targeted in this respect (as noted above), the most popular place with regard to Irbid's café scene is University street, where favorite cafés include: Siwar Café (Nassim Square), Al Tarboush Café, Al Hakorah Café, Ta'mia Café, Mango Café, Shisha Café, Al Kazar Café, Youne Café and Al Rayan Café. Tal Al Atin street, Petra street and Wasfi Al Tall Square (Irbid City) are also popular for their café scene, as are Irbid Mall and Arabila Mall. The two venues, Kamal Café and Khamis Café, located on Wasfi Al Tall Square are particularly popular with young people. In all of these cases, it is typically youths aged 17 and over who frequent these locations. However, it is noteworthy that there are class distinctions at play: because the cafés within malls are more expensive, it is predominantly middle-upper class youth who choose to go there rather than to street cafés. Thus, unemployed youths from working-class backgrounds are more likely to be found along the aforementioned streets than in local malls. Yet in Irbid's more deprived neighborhoods such as Hanina, where unemployed and vulnerable youth are likely to be concentrated, there is reportedly a distinct lack of café culture. Here, youth tend to gather on sidewalks instead. Generational divides are also evident when observing Irbid's cafés scene. For example, older men prefer to frequent more long-established cafés such as the famous Kamel Café (located on Idoun street by Wisfital Roundabout in Irbid City), rather than those found along University street and within the city's malls.

The functional value of belonging to a VEO might be intrinsic to membership in and of itself. Though there is also evidence to suggest that VEOs in Jordan are specifically providing rewarding occupational opportunities for youth that are unavailable in their home communities, such as media positions for aspiring journalists.¹⁶⁹ As well as among the indigenous population, this is evident in local refugee camps,¹⁷⁰ notably Irbid Camp just north of the city center, which is notorious for its large Palestinian population. Perhaps more obviously, unemployment lends itself to VEO recruitment because recruiters provide financial benefits to prospective recruits. (For more on the relationship between economic deprivation and VEO recruitment, see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt.) Meanwhile, idle residents are generally more likely to be drawn into errant circles of influence, which many respondents

¹⁶⁷ "Some youths go [to Syria] to prove themselves – [to show] that they can play a role in society. Some of them know that they are going to die but they are convinced that they will be known and that people will call them a martyr and know their name." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁶⁸ "As for the males, they target them in cafés – not just any café, but they go to very local cafés and monitor individuals. They see who is there frequently and has a lot of free time, and they focus on those that seem unemployed – those that don't have anything better to do than to go sit at the café." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁶⁹ Su, Alice 2015. 'The boy named Jihad: from the ashes of the Arab Spring to the battlefields of Syria', The Atlantic, June 19, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ "I noticed how people got affected in Irbid Camp more than anything – especially guys who had nothing to do with their time and no place to go to blow off some steam. In the end they are refugees and they have no future." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

associated with violent extremist propensities.¹⁷¹ While recognizing that an influx of Syrian refugees has put a strain on the job market and purchasing power,¹⁷² some respondents continued to blame the government for failing to create sufficient opportunities. Indeed, a striking 49 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 47 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the central government does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 8).

"They [VE groups] use young people who are still at the beginning of their lives and have spare time, and are not doing anything positive with their lives. They drag them into it with money. Because when you are unemployed and have no money and much time, it is very easy to get attracted to join these groups."

(Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

Figure 7. To what extent do you agree that lots of bored youths is a problem in your community?

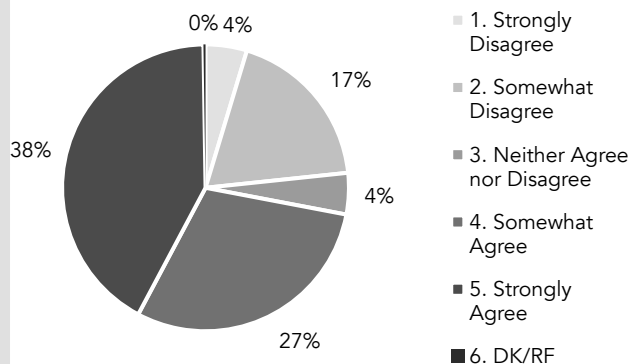
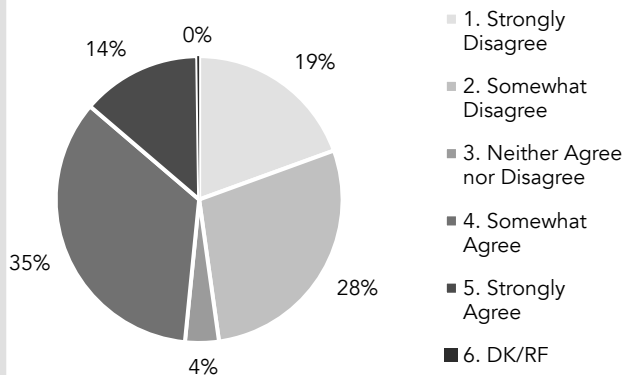


Figure 8. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not care about the needs of the people?



¹⁷¹ "People are so empty and unemployed; there is no education and they are not raised properly. They have a tendency for religion and wrong thoughts and radicalization. Some of them have criminal records but mainly trouble making...When there are no job opportunities for people they become lost and they don't use their time right, and they might do wrong things." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

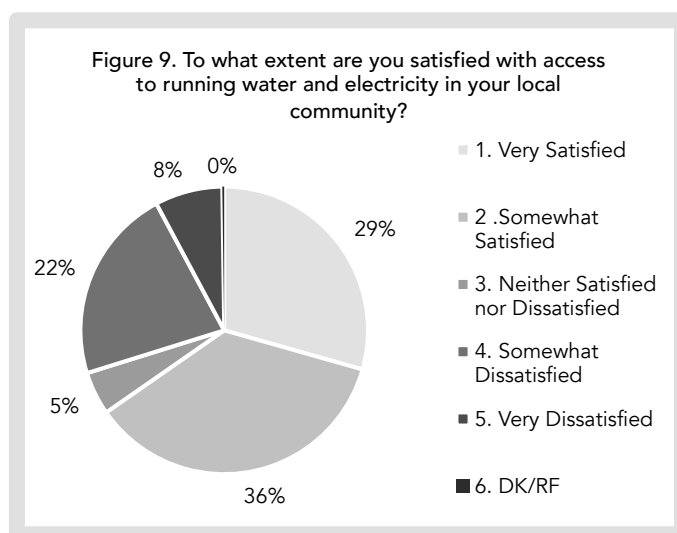
¹⁷² "Jordanians changed a lot after the Syrians came to Jordan and the economy was affected. Prices became high and work opportunities became less." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

3.2 UTILITIES AND SERVICES

Though adequate for the majority, water and electricity are expensive, and water shortages are problematic in certain areas.

With power cuts an occasional but common occurrence (typically during heat waves), electricity supplies in Irbid are evidently inferior to those in Jordan's better-served governorates such as Aqaba and Amman. There are also complaints about electricity prices being too high in Irbid – approximately 50 JD per household per month according to one respondent. However, most residents were reasonably satisfied with the electricity situation in their neighborhood. Similar conclusions can be drawn about Irbid's water supplies. For those who have access to running water, they typically receive it through pipes as it is pumped up into tanks usually installed on rooftops. This is then used

predominantly for washing, as it is considered unfit for cooking or drinking - residents either install purifiers in their homes or rely on bottled water for consumption purposes. Though expensive – approximately 35 JD for a full tank each week – and undrinkable, the majority of locals are reasonably content with their situation. However, there is geographical inequality in terms of water services across Irbid: according to one respondent, while University street, the southern quarter and the eastern quarter of Irbid Qasabah receive water twice per week in the summer and three times per week in the winter, other areas such as Huwwarah, Husn Camp and the northern quarter of Irbid Qasabah receive it only once per week in the summer and twice per week in the winter. Even then, due to an inadequate pumping system, the water often fails to reach the higher floors of the buildings. This is particularly problematic considering that the majority of Irbid's residents store their water in rooftop tanks. The water services are exceptionally deficient in some of the poorer neighborhoods – notably those in the northern quarter of Irbid. For example, in the Sharqi neighborhood, it is difficult to access running water due to dependence on old and faulty pipelines.¹⁷³ Meanwhile, Hakama street and Al Quds street are reportedly disconnected from the water lines entirely. Hanina is another neighborhood that suffers from poor water services, which has even resulted in violent protests. For example, in August 2012, armed security forces eventually dispersed tens of young men after they had been burning tires and throwing stones at shops and security personnel in revolt against continuous water outages in Hanina. Reportedly, water pumps in Hanina are exceptionally poor quality, often obliging locals to resort to buying water from water tanks at a greater expense. For many of those in Hanina and in other neighborhoods across the governorate, this is



¹⁷³ "Some areas in Irbid, you cannot reach water – sometimes there is no water for them...like Hayy Sharqi [Sharqi neighborhood]...I'm talking about the pipe – it's an old pipe, sometimes it's cutting. That's why they cannot reach water." (Male, 25, Hotel Receptionist, Aqaba)

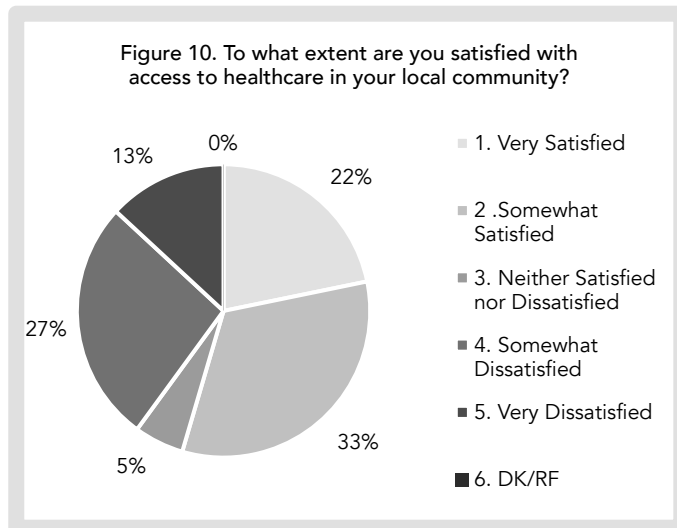
unaffordable. Consequently, some families are compelled to borrow from neighbors when possible. Two other areas within Irbid that are notably subject to water shortages are Ramtha and Sahel Horan. For a significant proportion of the public here, the main cause of water scarcity is a disconnection from the public water network.¹⁷⁴ The influx of Syrian refugees is also evidently a contributing factor to water scarcity in Irbid, triggering a 2016 well-drilling project in the governorate.¹⁷⁵ Quantitative findings supported these observations, indicating that the majority of Irbid's residents deem their water and electricity services to be adequate, but that a considerable proportion are insufficiently serviced: 65 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported being very or somewhat satisfied, while 30 percent reported being very or somewhat dissatisfied with access to running water and electricity in their local community (see Figure 9).

"Water is not good to drink. Because of the pipe or the supply, we don't know. It's good only for showers...It's coming I think one time per week. In each house you will find a big tank. They have maybe two/four/six meters on the rooftop [and they will] fill it every week. This is the problem – not every day."

(Male, 25, Hotel Receptionist, Aqaba)

Many locals are dissatisfied with healthcare services in Irbid, and major hospitals are either expensive or poorly equipped.

Irbid contains a number of hospitals and health centers, both private and government-funded. 40 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported being very or somewhat dissatisfied, while 55 percent reported being very or somewhat satisfied with access to healthcare in their local community (see Figure 10). However, despite a fair supply of facilities, many locals are limited to the use of government-funded hospitals due to the greater expense of private options. For example, one respondent estimated that for a check-up in a private hospital, residents are charged between 20-25 JD. Meanwhile however, some of the public hospitals have a particularly poor reputation. This includes Princess Basma Hospital (Abu Dujanah street, Irbid City), which locals refer to as the "death hospital". The facility's quality of staff and equipment are singled out as inferior to other hospitals in the governorate, including the government-funded King Abdullah University Hospital (Ramtha), which has a good reputation. The relatively high levels of discontent with local healthcare services indicate that



¹⁷⁴ REACH 2015. Social Cohesion in Host Communities in Northern Jordan: Assessment Report, May 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Namrouqa, Hana 2016. 'New wells being drilled in Ajloun, Irbid to cope with rising demand', The Jordan Times, June 07, 2016.

despite relative ease of access to healthcare of some form, many respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of care.

"In Basma [Princess Basma Hospital], no. They are saying this is the 'death hospital'...for King Abdullah [University Hospital] it's really good. For the rest, they are special [private] – it's good [but expensive]."

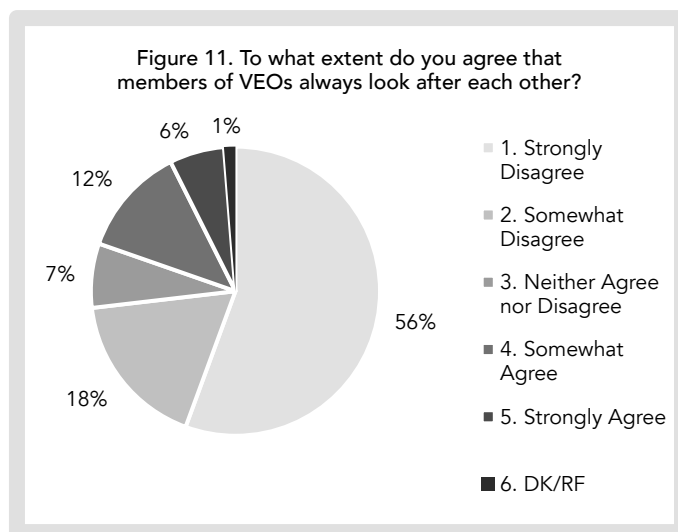
(Male, 25, Hotel Receptionist, Aqaba)

3.3 ECONOMY, HOUSING AND DEBT

Economic deprivation is a major starting point on the path to radicalization, as it can be exploited by VEOs.

The vast majority of respondents claimed that economic deprivation is one of the most important factors driving people toward VEOs. This is discernible in the profile of at least one of the March 2016 Irbid raid suspects: Abd Al Haq Al Bdour from Samad.¹⁷⁶ The relationship between economic strife and local VE is not necessarily direct. For many of the economically aggrieved, a stronger religious commitment offers a degree of psychological relief and comfort.¹⁷⁷ It is from here in the religious arena that individuals are more likely to encounter, and become more responsive to, the ideological messaging of VEO representatives. One respondent from a village on the outskirts of Irbid Qasabah

asserted that a similar trajectory was taken by many of the impoverished masses in her community.¹⁷⁸ Alternatively, the economically insecure may essentially be fast-tracked to Salafist Jihadism as they and their families seek extreme metaphysical solutions to their distressing living conditions. In some cases, this is in response to economic shock events such as the closure of a business and/or the loss of employment.¹⁷⁹ Confirming this, one respondent suggested that VEOs constitute “incubators” for those in need of financial, physical, social and ideological security.¹⁸⁰ While other residents share this view, they constitute a minority. For example, 74 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 18 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that members of VEOs always look after each other (see Figure 11).



¹⁷⁶ “I know one of them. His name is Abd Al Haq Al Bdour. He is from Samad. I know that he is very poor, and he is unemployed. He is one of the people that were killed in the operation in Irbid. His family's financial status is very low; they live in houses like caves.” (Male, 45, Consultant, Ajloun)

¹⁷⁷ “There is economic frustration, poverty and unemployment, and a religious discourse that organizes a big part of the traditions of communication between the people of society. Thus, some people find refuge in people with extremist religious discourse, either to explain or to answer outstanding questions.” (Male, 48, Journalist, Irbid)

¹⁷⁸ “Most people in my area have no money or food so they become religious.” (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

¹⁷⁹ “The Municipality of Irbid took his sweets tray and threatened to close his business. They closed his market and after one week he left and joined a group and he is fighting with them now. He was 33 years old.” (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

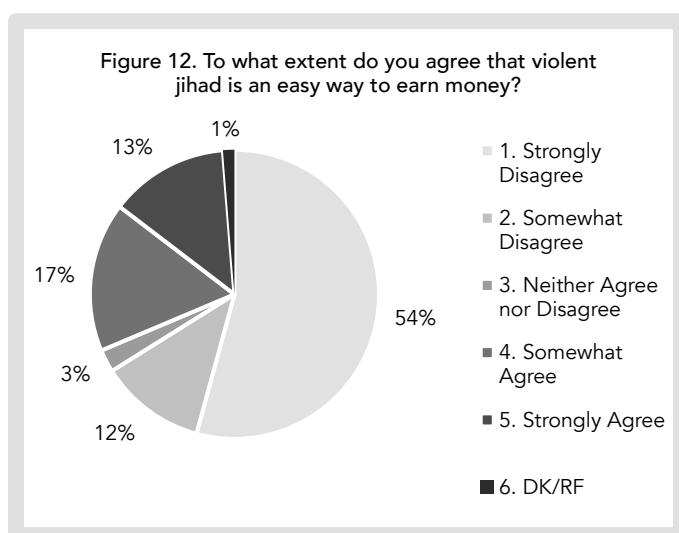
¹⁸⁰ “People are looking for incubators that nurture them financially, militarily and ideologically...Man by his individual nature loves community, because an individual with a community feels support and power, and because the individual without the community feels lonely. With an organization he feels powerful; there is someone who takes care of him and provides compassion.” (Male, 50, Journalist, Amman - on Irbid governorate)

"The first problem is that the victims here are poor communities because those people have no money. So they direct their energy to find other means of living like sending their kids to jihad, and by doing so they can go to heaven eventually and live another life: life after death. They see that it's the only way for them to live a good life when they die and go to heaven."

(Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

A significant minority of respondents believe VEOs offer a simple solution to locals' financial problems.

Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that a quest for religious solace does not necessarily occur in isolation; VEOs actively exploit local citizens' economic strains in the first instance to draw them deeper into Salafist religious circles. Indeed, respondents indicated that VEOs have demonstrated considerable skill in doing so. Furthermore, they have considerable capacity to do so. As one respondent explained, there are often wealthy lawyers and traders supporting local VEOs.¹⁸¹ This would perhaps answer questions of how local Salafist Jihadist leaders such as Al Tahawi have been able to funnel finances to recruits – even from prison.¹⁸² Several respondents claimed that VEOs use this leverage to propose economic assurances to prospective recruits, such as the promise that their families will be looked after in any event.¹⁸³ Moreover, on occasion, VEOs reportedly assess their subjects' financial situations before distributing aid to their families.¹⁸⁴ As is inherent in these approaches, VEOs are not known to recruit locally through coercive measures.¹⁸⁵ Rather, they depend on provision and persuasion to attract newcomers, as is manifest in some of the propaganda produced by these groups. One respondent for



¹⁸¹ "These extremist groups have a lot of rich lawyers and traders who back them." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

¹⁸² "Whoever wanted to go [to Syria] they gave him 5000 JD from Islamic groups like Mohammad Al Tahawi. He was in prison and no one knows how he got the money." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

¹⁸³ "They convince the individual that they will send money to the family the entire time they are away, and that if anything happens to the individual this will continue. I think these promises are lies only to lure youths and to convince them to go with them...I think they are lying to be able to recruit a higher number of youths without them being scared or fearful about their families and children." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁸⁴ "They sometimes deliver aid to the families in the neighborhood so that they are recognized. Then they start attracting who they want, either through money, ardor or an emotional bid for action." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁸⁵ "I have not heard about any case of someone going there [to fight in Syria] by force, or going without being convinced about their [VEOs] ideology." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

instance, confirmed that VEOs address issues of poverty and discrimination in their messaging and music to powerful effect.¹⁸⁶ Reflecting this, quantitative findings showed that a sizeable minority of locals considers fighting with VEOs to be an avenue toward economic advancement: though 66 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, 30 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that violent jihad is an easy way to earn money (see Figure 12).

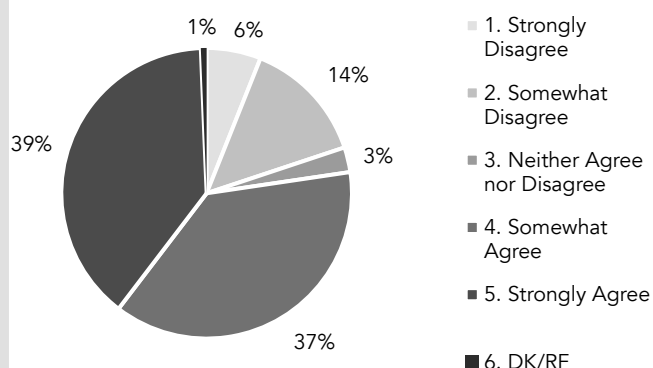
"Because things are hard economically, sometimes to find an outlet and take a breath he says let me resort to religion. But he wants to resort to religion in a certain way, in a light way. Yet when he sometimes meets people at the mosque or by coincidence, or if people notice him at the mosque and say let's talk to him, they try to change his ideas. Then he becomes very religious, and this is of course wrong."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

The difficulty in finding employment in Irbid is exacerbated by high levels of personal debt that increase locals' desperation and make them vulnerable to VEO recruitment.

Several respondents suggested that it is because Irbid is exceptional in its levels of poverty and unemployment that VEOs target the area more than other governorates in Jordan. Irbid's considerable economic insecurity is manifest in endemic debt across the governorate: an overwhelming 76 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 20 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that debt is a problem in their community (see Figure 13). Respondents traced a correlation between economic need and local extremism, and suggested that the material rewards of joining VEOs tend to precede any VE religious commitments. That is, while religious indoctrination may serve to facilitate and consolidate VEO commitment, economic rewards constitute the lure – and economic constraints constitute the driver – that initiates a relationship from which a "brainwashing" process can begin.¹⁸⁷ In one case, a local youth is

Figure 13. To what extent do you agree that debt is a problem in your community?



¹⁸⁶ "When you hear what they [VEOs] say and the songs they sing - they talk about poverty and fights and discrimination - you will see eventually that it's good to be with them when you see their messages." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

¹⁸⁷ "They attract them with money first and then when they join, they brainwash them and change their idea about religion." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

known to have advanced from a state of poverty to being a millionaire within a year of having joined JN.¹⁸⁸ Such rumors are likely to sustain the reputation of VEOs as alternative sources of wealth.

"The son had the courage to tell his family because he knew that they would support him for the money and the cars, and that he would get thousands and thousands of Dinars. This is the picture that was described for him, and he translated it to his family. The mother thought that if they would get 1000 JD every month it would solve all their financial problems. Then after dragging him in with money, they [VEOs] convinced him through religion that he is going to jihad with his fellow brothers in Syria, and that he will go to heaven."

(Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

Young men from impoverished and densely populated suburbs are particularly susceptible to VEO exploitation.

Certain areas within Irbid are notorious for their levels of neglect, and exceptionally at risk of exploitation by VEOs. These areas include Al Barha village (located in Irbid Qasabah, between Al Quds street and Ibn Khaldoun street),¹⁸⁹ Palestine street (located between the Hikmah neighborhood and Al Nuzha neighborhood in Irbid Qasabah), Jerusalem street (Irbid Qasabah), Fo'ara (located in Irbid Qasabah), the Turkman neighborhood (located west of the city center close to Princess Basma Hospital) – most notably Al Arous street - Al Matareq neighborhood (Irbid City) and the Ashrafiyah area (located in Koorah district). Each of these locations is notable for its economic deprivation, low levels of education and poor public services. The latter is especially applicable to the Turkman neighborhood, where housing and sanitation infrastructure is notoriously bad – sewage water can often be found along the streets.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, some of the suspects from the March 2016 Irbid raid are reported to have been residents of the Turkman neighborhood.¹⁹¹ Yet potentially the greatest VE threats are concentrated within the Hanina neighborhood (Irbid Qasabah) and the neighborhoods surrounding Irbid Camp. One indication of this was the March 2016 raids, which occurred between the Hakama street traffic lights and Al Quds Bakery within Hanina.¹⁹² Furthermore, individual members of the cell that was targeted by the raid also reportedly hail from Hanina and the outskirts of Irbid Camp.¹⁹³ An earlier indication is the 2011 clashes that occurred between Salafist Jihadists and national security forces during a demonstration within

¹⁸⁸ "He was very poor and grew financially with Al Nusra. In a year he had so much money...In the beginning he worked as a street vendor, his financial situation was modest...he became a millionaire in less than a year." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁸⁹ "Also in Al Barha: most of the people that reside there are trouble makers. They are less fortunate and can be lured and recruited by terrorist groups." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁹⁰ "Turkman neighborhood for example, receives only services in half of the neighborhood. They have bad drainage and many houses are made from mud and Zinc. They feel marginalized in every way, and that is why they are more likely to be lured [toward VEOs]." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

¹⁹¹ "There is also the Turkman area, [from which] some residents were among the ones in the Irbid incidents." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

¹⁹² Mail Online 2016. 'Jordan: 7 killed in raid had ties to IS, planned attacks', Mail Online, March 02, 2016.

¹⁹³ Ammon News 2016. 'Jordanian security clash with extremist militants in Irbid', Ammon News, March 01, 2016.

Hanina.¹⁹⁴ Hanina's historical reputation for accommodating VE can also be traced back to events in 2005, when 15 residents from the district were prosecuted on terror charges.¹⁹⁵ Court records from the case describe the defendants' regular meetings at Hanina's Qaqa Mosque, which is reported to have been used as a platform for extremist religious expression echoing the discourse of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, several respondents confirmed that the Hanina neighborhood and Hashmi street (the main road linking Irbid Camp peripheries and central Irbid) are notorious for containing large numbers of Salafist Jihadists,¹⁹⁷ suggesting a number of reasons for this.¹⁹⁸ These include exceptional levels of population density, ethnic diversity, youth inactivity, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, as well as poor service provision compared with that of the city center. For similar reasons (bar population density and ethnic diversity), suburban villages and city outskirts were generally identified as more susceptible to VE than city centers.¹⁹⁹ For example, there are lower levels of public services in suburban areas compared with urban centers.²⁰⁰ Consequently, high levels of economic and social neglect are more likely to generate grievances to be exploited by VEOs. At the same time, city outskirts and suburban areas lack the same degree of security presence as city centers, leaving them with a heightened vulnerability to crime as well as the exploits of Salafist Jihadists and VEO operatives. This includes an absence of street cameras and police patrols. Irbid's proximity to the Syrian border where foreign VEO operatives are thought to have been infiltrating the country has amplified these dangers.²⁰¹ Aware of these hazards, locals tend to avoid certain areas at night for fear of encountering hostility. This applies specifically to Turkman neighborhood, Hashmi street, Hanina neighborhood and Al Barha village. Irbid's rural areas meanwhile, are not generally associated with VE. Though respondents identified North Ghor as vulnerable to VE due to its high levels of poverty and unemployment, and its lack of youth facilities, the area has not endured the pressures incurred by a large refugee influx, and it has high levels of security due to its proximity to the Israeli border.

"These areas are most at risk for the recruitment of youths. They are congested in terms of population. Also people are from many different ethnicities. They are bored over there, they are poor, less fortunate, and have fewer job opportunities with low rates of education. They do not have

¹⁹⁴ The Middle East Media Research Institute 2011. 'Salafi Jihadist movement in Jordan threatens demonstration in Amman, warns of 'storm of jihad'', MEMRI, April 11, 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Rosen, Nir 2006. 'Iraq's Jordanian jihadis', The New York Times Magazine, February 19, 2006.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ "We faced a problem with Salafists and they used swords. This incident happened in Hanina in Irbid. I wonder what they would do if they had guns. I believe they are hidden cells and they come out when something happens. In Hanina and Hashmi areas there are extreme people." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

¹⁹⁸ Respondents' association of Salafist Jihadists with Hashmi street may be based on the fact that this street is typically the first to road-blocked when there are security concerns around Irbid Camp.

¹⁹⁹ "I think that the people in the villages are more in need than those in the cities, because they are easier to recruit and lure." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²⁰⁰ REACH 2014. 'Syrian refugees in host communities: key informant interviews and district profiling', REACH, January 2014.

²⁰¹ The Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2016. 'Interview with His Majesty King Abdullah II with BBC's Lyse Ducet', February 02, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/news/interview-his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-bbc-s-lyse-doucet>>

the same services as those in the city of Irbid, and those who do work have professions that are very low-paid. So they cannot provide for the needs of their families."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

Economic concerns are most acute for men between high school and middle age, making VEO participation attractive and NGO activity in Irbid has had limited effect.

Respondents suggested that it is particularly men aged between 18-40 that are susceptible to VEOs because this is the period in their life when they are most affected by economic concerns.²⁰² For instance, it is typically during these ages when men are most professionally active and when they begin to create families. In one case, an individual is purported to have joined JN after being unable to afford a marriage. This scenario is not entirely uncommon. A few respondents revealed that for the financially strained, VEOs offer a tantalizing opportunity to marry easily and cheaply.²⁰³ According to one respondent, these genuine relational and economic driving factors are frequently masked by a false jihadist motivation.²⁰⁴ It is important to add that it is not exclusively men who are prone to VEO engagement. Several respondents indicated that a proportionally small number of women are also active in VE activities, albeit usually in a more supervisory capacity.²⁰⁵ As would be expected within conservative religious circles, female extremists playing a more active role tend only to engage with other women. Typical venues for such interaction are thought to be schools, universities and community centers (see for example section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives).²⁰⁶ There are ongoing initiatives to alleviate the economic strains among Irbid's poorest communities. For example, a number of international NGOs are implementing training, counseling, health and cash assistance programs for the most vulnerable local families. Examples include the IRC,²⁰⁷ the Norwegian Refugee Council,²⁰⁸ and the Near East Foundation.²⁰⁹ However, while respondents recognized the presence of charitable organizations, they expressed doubt over their true motives. One respondent for instance, claimed that NGOs operating in

²⁰² "Because these age groups are at their prime, and they face conditions. Most of them face bad economic conditions, so they are more prone to join these groups." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁰³ "They can also persuade youths by providing them with a wife and women - especially if they are not well off financially and cannot afford to get married." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁰⁴ "The main reason for people who join is money, because if they really believed in jihad they would've gone to Palestine. But they are being paid big money and this makes people interested in joining." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

²⁰⁵ "Females also have a role in transferring money, hiding weapons and equipment. Because women are less suspicious than males they can have a hand in terror activities in an indirect way." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁰⁶ "We need to also monitor women because they target such locations [community centers]. They can spread false ideas to women in such places, and recruit some female students in schools and universities." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²⁰⁷ International Rescue Committee, accessed July 16, 2016. Available at: <<https://www.rescue.org/country/jordan#how-does-the-irc-help-in-jordan>>.

²⁰⁸ The Jordan Times 2016. 'Norwegian NGO distributes cash assistance to Jordanian, Syrian families', The Jordan Times, March 22, 2016.

²⁰⁹ The Near East Foundation, accessed July 21 2016. Available at: <<http://www.neareast.org/where-we-work/jordan/>>.

the area are only concerned with securing funds, rather than attending to social needs.²¹⁰ Another respondent complained that local NGOs are guilty of financial irresponsibility,²¹¹ and that their refusal to cooperate with one another is inhibiting operational efficiency.²¹² Additionally, there is indignation among host communities arising from a sense that NGOs are catering to Syrians but neglecting impoverished Jordanians.²¹³

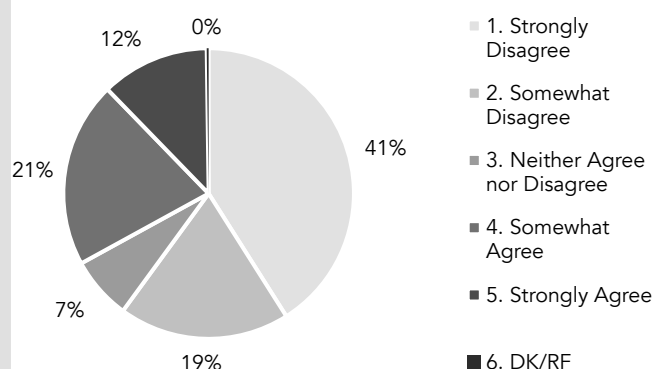
"With regard to the economic status of those recruited, they usually recruit those from the impoverished segment of society. They lure them with money, and with the idea that they can improve their condition. They also recruit unmarried men by luring them with the idea of "Nikah Marriage". So the male youths consider this to be an opportunity to improve their economic status and to get married without any costs: a marriage is [otherwise] very expensive, especially in Jordan."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

Refugee camp peripheries are radicalization hotspots, where densely populated communities endure high levels of poverty, low levels of governance and a lack of social solidarity.

Several respondents identified the outskirts of refugee camps as some of the most vulnerable locations to VEO influences. There are a number of reasons for this. First, camps and their peripheries accommodate high levels of poverty, rendering large numbers of destitute individuals exceptionally responsive to VEO recruitment packages.²¹⁴ Second, residents on the outskirts of camps are generally less settled than those in the center and thereby more receptive to messages of belonging and responsibility as propounded by Salafist Jihadist recruiters. Indeed, a

Figure 14. To what extent do you agree that you do not feel part of your community?



²¹⁰ "As for charitable organizations, their role is only to get funds without the actual objective of helping society. Most of these organizations operate in this way, and they are only a face so to speak." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

²¹¹ "Unfortunately, many organizations misuse the funds that they get. This should be monitored and followed by the government to fight corruption, by visiting these organizations or NGOs regularly to check if they are doing their jobs efficiently and benefiting society." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

²¹² "We tried to associate with other organizations to increase the range of our work, but unfortunately most organizations refused because each one wants to have their own work and their own support and funds. If there were any cooperation between these organizations, the benefits would be great and would have covered more areas." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

²¹³ "Nowadays all the organizations are only helping Syrians, not poor Jordanians - they are not really helped...Syrians receive donations from various actors but Jordanians do not receive any aid or donations." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²¹⁴ "People in the camps...their financial situation is also very bad and they have no work opportunities in Jordan so it's easy for them to be convinced to go to Syria." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

considerable minority of Irbid's residents consider themselves socially alienated: 33 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 60 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that they do not feel part of their community (see Figure 14). Third, camps and their peripheries are densely populated and demographically diverse areas, enabling Salafist Jihadists to operate more freely without attracting unwanted attention. Fourth, to a greater degree than those residing in the camp centers, those on the outskirts are living in disorderly communities. For instance, respondents emphasized that governance is much weaker in these areas compared to that in the camp centers. Furthermore, because there is a higher degree of population movement across the camp-borders, relationships are also weaker and there is little sense of social solidarity. As with the demographic diversity that characterizes camp peripheries, this facilitates VE infiltration into these areas, where the presence of strangers is relatively inconspicuous. Finally, one respondent asserted that regardless of education levels and geographical location, some locals are especially susceptible to VEO influences due to their lack of cultural integration. The proposed reason for this is that culturally isolated groups are less likely to be publicly and politically engaged, and therefore less socially insulated from radical ideas and less perceptive to the presence of extremist groups and individuals.²¹⁵ Likewise, without a cultural backbone, residents are likely to be more malleable to the designs of VEOs. This substantiates the observation that peripheral communities are more vulnerable to VEO influences, as they are less likely to be culturally integrated. Respondents singled out Al Husn Refugee Camp as being especially renowned for its socio-economic neglect, religious intensity and VE influences,²¹⁶ though there is limited evidence to suggest that the camp has provided many recruits for VEOs in Syria. Additionally, Irbid Camp was frequently mentioned as a VE hotspot that has produced VEO recruits in the past,²¹⁷ including Mahmoud Mahdi Al Zaydan (AQ) and his son Omar Mahdi Al Zaydan (ISIS).²¹⁸ Members of the cell targeted by the March 2016 Irbid raid are also thought to have strong links with Irbid Camp, where they allegedly received training.²¹⁹ Though the majority of respondents identified a link between these refugee camps and VE, there were suggestions that the VE threat from these locations is a recent phenomenon rather than an inherent one. One respondent for instance, claimed that it was only upon the arrival of Syrian refugees that extremism surfaced there.²²⁰

"As for outskirts, it's different because there is no one to control them. The residents change continuously and there are unsettled groups. For example, some of the people who committed the incidents at Irbid are from the villages, and others are from the camp. But they didn't commit any terrorist action inside the camp because there they would be exposed. They were at the far ends of

²¹⁵ "[He] who is less exposed to culture will be less [aware]." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

²¹⁶ According to the United Nations, 23 percent of the residents in Al Husn Camp are living below the poverty line. The camp also has an 18 percent unemployment rate and almost half the population is without health insurance (UNRWA, accessed June 19, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/camp/husn-camp>>)

²¹⁷ "I knew a guy who was a troublemaker and stopped. Then he went to Syria and came back with a bullet in his head. He was with the Al Nusra and used to live in Irbid Camp." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

²¹⁸ The National 2010. 'Jordanian militant dies in Pakistan's tribal region', The National, January 13, 2010.

²¹⁹ "The individuals that carried out the events in Irbid were being trained in the same camp [Irbid Camp]," (Female, Program Manager, Amman - on Irbid governorate)

²²⁰ "Even though these refugee camps have been in Jordan for a long time, we never had extremism until the Syrians entered. They planted seeds in people's minds within the camp." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

the camp, around 200 meters...It's very hard to do it inside; everybody knows each other and the foreigner will be exposed quickly."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

Locals consider various dimensions of inequality to be socially problematic and inter-tribal conflicts are not uncommon.

In discussions, respondents did not describe any significant degree of tension between West Bankers and East Bankers within Irbid. However quantitative findings did reveal that a significant minority perceive an element of inequality between East Bankers and West Bankers: 49 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 44 percent agreed that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem in their community (see Figure 15). An additional perceived dimension of inequality in Irbid is that between various tribes. For example, certain important public sector jobs are restricted to particular tribal families. Based on individuals holding high government positions, these tribes are likely to include the Obaidat, the Rawabdeh, Al Tal, and Batayneh. Quantitative findings supported the notion of tribal inequality in Irbid: 50 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 44 percent disagreed that inequality between tribes is a problem in their community (see Figure 16). There are also frequent (often violent) conflicts between various tribes (see section 5.3 Exposure to Crime and Conflict), with the most notorious rivalries being between the Qur'an and Al Awneh tribes (both based in Taybeh district) on the one hand, and between the Bani Hani and Batayneh tribes (both based in Al Barha) on the other. Political elections are a typical subject of tension between these tribes.

Figure 15. To what extent do you agree that inequality between East and West Bank Jordanians is a problem in your community?

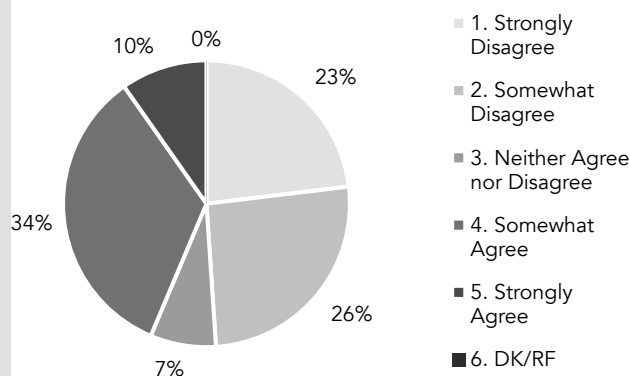
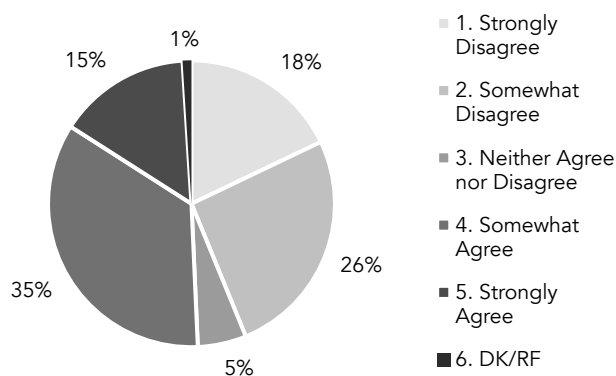


Figure 16. To what extent do you agree that inequality between tribes is a problem in your community?



The influx of Syrian refugees is crowding locals out of the housing and job markets, forcing them into precarious financial situations that leave them vulnerable to VE exploitation.

In response to the influx of refugees into Irbid and an increasing demand for accommodation, house and rental prices have soared.²²¹ Accordingly, a considerable 54 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported being very or somewhat dissatisfied, while 41 percent reported being very or somewhat satisfied with access to affordable housing in their local community (see Figure 17). Meanwhile, respondents claimed that Syrian refugees are squeezing locals out of the housing market because they are willing to pay more for their accommodation, which they share between multiple families.²²² In order to compete then, locals without financial flexibility must adjust their domestic conventions by living with other families and splitting the costs, which they are reluctant to do.²²³ Syrians' advantage in the housing market is augmented by NGO cash-for-rent programs, about which some Jordanian locals complain because they feel excluded from these benefits, which are themselves driving up prices. According to one respondent, some refugees are actually selling their charity-provided material subsidies to local Jordanians,²²⁴ further augmenting their financial advantage. This sense of exclusion suggests that NGOs' emphasis on delivering for host communities as well as refugees - as with conditional cash projects for vulnerable children -²²⁵ is either obscured or failing to materialize. Indeed, the shortcomings of these programs has been directly addressed in Irbid, with some NGOs - notably the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) - encouraging housing construction to stem the rise in prices.²²⁶ However, as the NRC program is geared toward providing free accommodation exclusively for refugees, feelings of indignation among host communities are unlikely to be assuaged, which was reflected in quantitative findings. For example, 52 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 42 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that inequality between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem in their community (see Figure 18). Claims that Syrian competition is primarily responsible for soaring accommodation costs is substantiated by the fact that it is in the areas with the highest concentrations of Syrian refugees that have experienced the sharpest housing price increases. This includes the southern neighborhood and numerous locations within Irbid Qasabah: University street, Al Jamal Circle, Al Sheikh Khalil area, Idoun street, Hashmi street and Al Sareeh street (Bani Obeid district). In these areas, the monthly rent for a very small house has reportedly reached approximately 200 JD, compared with 120-170 for some of Irbid's best houses before the Syrian refugee crisis began. Rising accommodation costs are driving locals toward precarious coping strategies such as borrowing money from friends and family and/or taking private loans.²²⁷ There is also evidence of citizens - especially in the West Irbid and Yarmouk municipalities -

²²¹ Carrion, Doris 2015. 'Syrian refugees in Jordan: confronting difficult truths', Chatham House, September 2015.

²²² "Syrians live together - different families together - and they are able to split the rent. In addition, there are many charities that are paying rent for Syrians...this caused the rent to increase in Jordan." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²²³ "[Jordanian families] cannot live with other families in one home; each family lives on their own in Jordan." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²²⁴ "Syrians get a lot of support and funding from all NGOs and organizations. They even sell some of the products they get." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

²²⁵ Islamic Relief Worldwide 2016. 'Case study, Irbid, Jordan', Islamic Relief Worldwide, April 25, 2016.

²²⁶ Urban Refugees.Org 2016. 'Housing solution to support urban refugees and host communities', Urban Refugees.org, April 18, 2016.

²²⁷ REACH 2015. Social Cohesion in Host Communities in Northern Jordan: Assessment Report, May 2015.

postponing marriage until they can comfortably afford accommodation.²²⁸ Based on the above analysis of local VEO recruitment tactics toward young, single, impoverished men, these coping mechanisms lend themselves to VEO strategies of seduction, whether through financial rewards and/or the provision of wives.²²⁹

In addition to accommodation issues, the Syrian refugee population is to an extent driving the host community out of the job market by accepting lower wages.²³⁰ This is true across many professions in the private sector - especially construction, hospitality, handicrafts, education, retail and manufacturing.²³¹ For example, in the construction sector property owners are choosing to employ Syrians over Jordanians as the former are known to be more experienced and efficient, and cheaper to employ. Similarly, Syrian women are considered superior handicraft professionals and Syrian men are considered superior cooks to Jordanians. A perceptible consequence of the latter is that many high quality Syrian restaurants and Patisseries have opened in Irbid, where the Syrian owners reportedly only hire fellow Syrians. Examples include the Domari Restaurant located in the Irbid New Complex and Jeet Bi Wa'tak Restaurant on University street. Meanwhile, many Jordanian restaurant owners in Irbid are laying off Jordanian employees in order to hire Syrians who will work longer hours for lower salaries. Likewise, locals have observed that in private schools, Jordanian teachers are being replaced by Syrians who will accept half the standard salary. One such school is Jordan National School, one of the largest in Irbid. One of the few benefits of NGO support for Syrians is that more locals are finding employment opportunities in the humanitarian sector than previously, with an increasing number of NGOs operating within Irbid since the beginning of the Syrian conflict.

"Jordanians were being kicked out of their homes for Syrians to live, because they would pay more than Jordanians. And after they leave the home it's destroyed. They live together - multiple families in one house, and so they split the rent. But Jordanians live only one family in a house. They [Syrian refugees] also work for lower-wages so employers preferred to higher two Syrians instead of one Jordanian. They began to work everywhere in the private sector, and part-time jobs, even in the industrial city and schools - everywhere but government positions."

(Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ "These groups will find your weakness and fix it: if you don't have money they will get you money, if you're not married they will get you a wife, if you need a car they'll buy you one, [if you] need a house they'll get you one." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

²³⁰ Stave, Svein Erik & Solveig Hillesund 2015. 'Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market: findings from the governorates of Amman, Irbid and Mafrq', International Labour Organization & Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Geneva: ILO, 2015.

²³¹ Ibid.

Figure 17. To what extent are you satisfied with access to affordable housing in your local community?

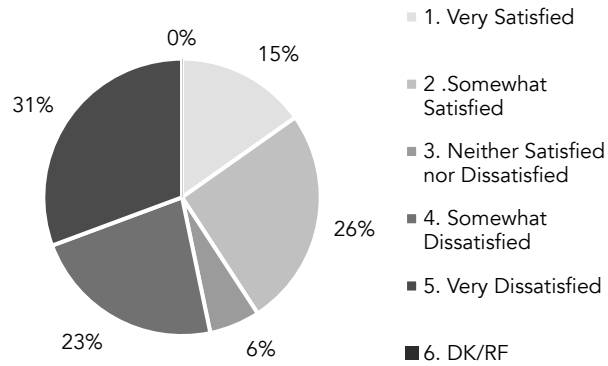
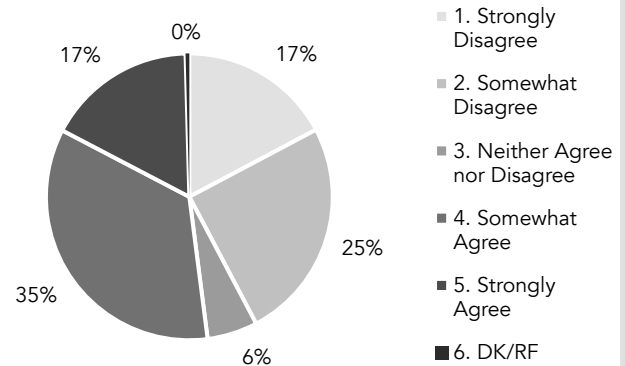


Figure 18. To what extent do you agree that inequality between Jordanians and Syrian refugees is a problem in your community?

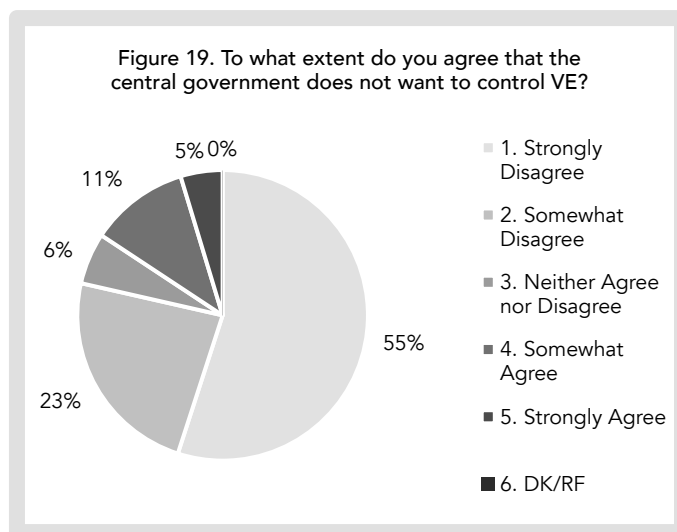


GOVERNANCE DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

3.4 CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Locals recognize the state's determination to tackle extremism through a variety of CVE initiatives.

The central government is delivering a number of initiatives aimed at countering the allure of VEOs for local youth. This includes public lectures, television programs, community workshops and projects, as well as Internet initiatives. Some of these campaigns promote messages exposing the atrocities of terrorist organizations and their distortion of Islam, such as that which took place in Irbid Chamber of Commerce (in front of Manasir Gas Station, Ratib Batayna street, Irbid City) in February 2016.²³² Others focus more directly on religion, seeking to disentangle Islam from politics. One example is the series of free public lectures in October 2010 that took place in Al Hashimiah Hall, Irbid Qasabah. The lectures were delivered by university professors including Samer Khair Ahmad and endorsed the governor of Irbid at the time, Khalid Abu Zaid. One respondent was incredibly positive about the perceived impact of this initiative, which predominantly attracted males aged in their 20s and females aged between 20-70.²³³ Other campaigns simply aim to strengthen the community and local economy. For example, respondents mentioned one local Member of Parliament (MP) named Samir Oais, who is generating popular support through his campaign activities within Irbid Camp. Among his initiatives are street-cleaning campaigns, family counseling and employment drives.²³⁴ Another focus of government campaigns is to undermine the broader ideologies of VEOs and raise awareness of them. This occasionally takes place in schools, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, school principals and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the International Committee of



²³² "The initiatives focusing on awareness took place in Irbid and they were about extremism and terrorism in different places. Though I did not attend any of the sessions, I heard about many of these lectures, some of which took place in [Irbid Chamber of Commerce]." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

²³³ "The lectures took place in the municipality of Irbid to provide the new generation of youths with information regarding the separation between politics and religion. After the lectures were finished, it was apparent that a large percentage of youths were convinced." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²³⁴ "Samir Oais, he always does initiatives like cleaning cemeteries and streets, and he tries to solve problems between families and help people to find work. He has a web page called 'My Job', where he uploads all job announcements. He also tries to create clubs, and he deals modestly with people. Considering that he is a politician, his actions make the people like him." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

the Red Cross and the Jordanian Red Crescent.²³⁵ One current example is the awareness campaign organized by the National Center for Human Rights in collaboration with the Municipality of Irbid, Irbid City security services and the Ministry of Education. This campaign is targeting 13 schools across the governorate addressing topics such as drug abuse, violence and VE. Some respondents were highly appreciative of these efforts, praising the scope and persistence of the various campaigns. Accordingly, 78 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while only 16 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that the central government does not want to control VE (see Figure 19).

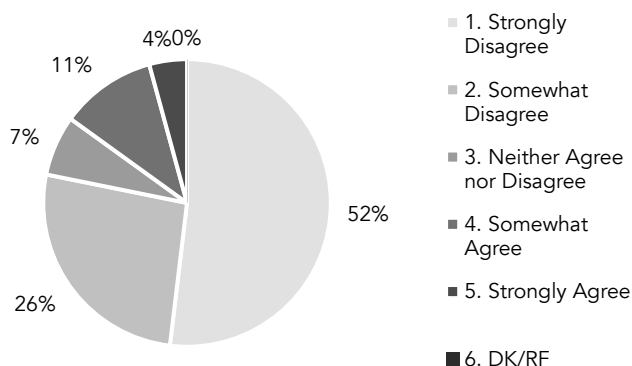
"It is natural for the Jordanian government to have a role in fighting extremism. It launched several awareness campaigns in cooperation with the security units, through lectures in different areas in Irbid. Also with the cooperation of organizations it conducted workshops about violent extremism, and I participated in many of these lectures. It tried to cover the whole city of Irbid and its villages, and targeted all people from all age groups, whether in schools, universities or specific groups where young people gather - males or females. The security unit also gave many lectures that targeted students at schools. The civil society organization gave lectures to parents on how to monitor their children and detect any strange behavior. The government's role did not stop ever since the Syrian conflict."

(Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

Residents consider central government awareness campaigns to be insufficient to address the problem of VE in Irbid.

Though respondents appreciated the necessity of central government CVE campaigning, the majority complained that current efforts are inadequate. Among the main reasons for this are the limited depth and consistency of government CVE initiatives.²³⁶ More specifically, respondents bemoaned the government's limited use of media platforms. For example, respondents claimed that television programming was not the most effective way of

Figure 20. To what extent do you agree that the central government does not have the power to control VE?



²³⁵ "We have a program specialized for schools - both elementary and high schools. It is in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. We have given many lectures about human trafficking, drug trafficking and terrorism, as well as other topics. [This is] also with the cooperation of the Red Cross and the city security forces. We did this in 18 schools." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

²³⁶ "There are many initiatives and programs focused on awareness, but these lectures are not sufficient. There are surely important factors that need to be considered beforehand, such as upbringing and people's own convictions. Also, we cannot raise awareness for a period of time and just stop; we need to do so continuously and on a long-term basis." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

reaching an audience. Instead, they asserted, the government should invest more resources in channeling anti-terrorism campaigns through social media sites such as Facebook. Another criticism of central government CVE awareness campaigns is that they have arrived too late. One respondent for example, contended that the terrorist threat has escalated into a security issue, and that awareness campaigns are now less urgent than military responses. He lamented that information campaigns had not been launched earlier to prevent the materialization of terrorism in the first instance.²³⁷ Other respondents did not acknowledge government CVE initiatives at all.²³⁸ Despite these shortcomings, there is a widespread belief that the government does indeed have the capacity to contain VE. For example, 78 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 15 percent agreed that the central government does not have the power to control VE (see Figure 20). Meanwhile however, despite the plethora of potential VE influences, findings suggested their detrimental impact has been minimal across the governorate. For example, quantitative results revealed that only 11 percent of Irbid GQ respondents agreed, while 89 percent disagreed that they or their family had suffered directly from VE (see Figure 21). Accounting for the relative lack of physical VE threats to citizens in Irbid, one respondent suggested that VEOs – namely Salafist Jihadists and ISIS - are more intent on targeting government entities than civilian ones, and that in order to secure the civilian support that they depend on, they need to maintain good relationships with locals.²³⁹

"Of course there is a possible role, like when the Jordan media explains for the youth the things that the extremists do, and the killings that they commit, and that their goal is to distort Islam and distort our world image...But it should be better and stronger, and not just through awareness or workshops but through TV programing and through social media. This is what the anti-drug department is doing: it sends messages to citizens through Facebook, [explaining] that these items are dangerous...people care about Facebook and phones, and not everyone watches television."

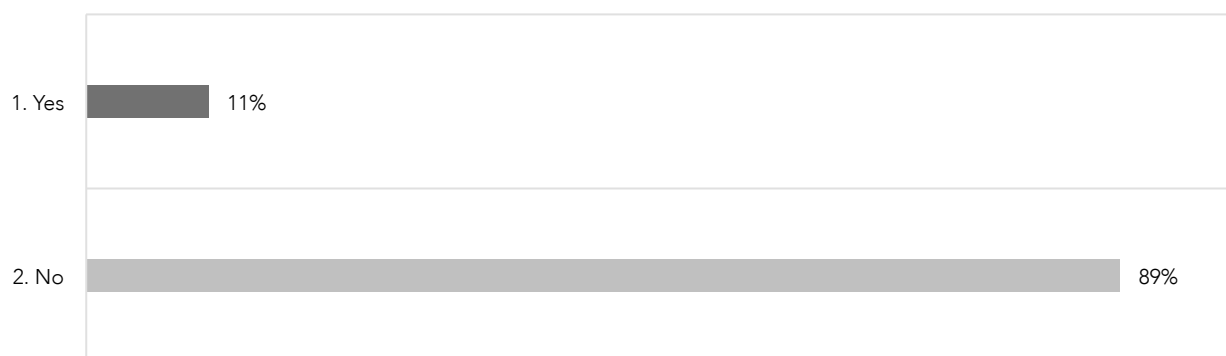
(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

²³⁷ "The security aspect is the most important thing nowadays because we are in a state of war with these groups. The priority is deal with them militarily or via the intelligence. The awareness should have been earlier. This is a shortcoming from us and it won't benefit us to address it now." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

²³⁸ "They [the government] are not doing anything good. They should also combat poverty rather than terrorism. In Zarqawi's mourning house there were governmental figures who did nothing. Also, when the PM Dhalaein's son blew himself up in Syria, the government did nothing and never asked any questions. They should have asked him why his son went there." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

²³⁹ "Violent extremism is a problem only with the government, not with the people because they [VEOs] want the people and not the government... their [VEOs] goals are against the government, not against the people. They will not do anything that affects the people; everything they think of just hurts the government." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Figure 21. Have you or your family directly suffered from VE?

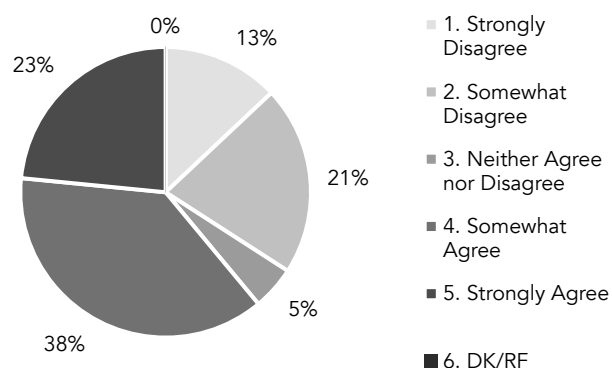


Internal corruption and economic deficiencies are perceived obstacles to government anti-terrorism initiatives.

With poverty identified as a significant factor contributing to VEO susceptibility in the local population, respondents acknowledged government efforts to strengthen the economy. However, these efforts were reportedly being thwarted by a rising population of refugees and financial misconduct by government officials. One respondent highlighted the government's culpability in allowing corruption to occur, stressing that government malefactors have not been adequately monitored or charged. A case in point is the alleged theft and sale by GID officers of weapons provided by the US and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) intended for Syrian rebels between 2013 and 2016.²⁴⁰

According to reports, several senior officials were aware of the misconduct and helped to conceal the scheme before it was uncovered in 2016.²⁴¹ Another indication of state corruption is the case against General Samih Battikhi, who was convicted in July 2003 on charges of fraud and embezzlement before having his sentence reduced.²⁴² Bearing in mind these high profile cases, it is understandable that state

Figure 22. To what extent do you agree that government officials are corrupt?



²⁴⁰ Mazzetti, Mark & Ali Younes 2016. 'C.I.A arms for Syrian rebels supplied black market, officials say', The New York Times, June 26, 2016.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

corruption is a widely recognized problem within Irbid: 61 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 34 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that government officials are corrupt (see Figure 22). Jordan's lack of natural resource wealth is also considered instrumental to the country's economic woes. Here too, respondents highlighted government neglect, claiming that it has done too little to advance new development projects in the governorate. As demonstrated by the presence of the Hirak movement (emerging in 2010/2011) in Irbid, state neglect and misconduct is a significant source of youth grievance.²⁴³ In some cases, it is a likely driving factor of VEO support among youth when less extreme channels of opposition such as Hirak become redundant.²⁴⁴

"It is known that the economy in Jordan is bad, but the government is trying to fix this situation. However, it sometimes fails to change things because of the population increase... This is in addition to corruption cases that have led to wealth being wasted; there are officials who steal and loot and smuggle outside of Jordan... Of course there is blame on the government for dereliction especially because it didn't monitor the officials who looted before they did it, and didn't put them on trial."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

Some accuse the central government of actively facilitating the rise of VEOs.

Some respondents went further than criticizing government shortcomings in countering the influence of VEOs, proposing that it has actively facilitated these organizations. The most serious allegations against the government accuse it of furtively nurturing VEOs. For example, one respondent claimed that JN has been a beneficiary of government support and benefits, and that the government is using the group as an instrument against the Syrian regime.²⁴⁵ Similarly, some respondents contended that the government released Salafist Jihadists from prison and smuggled them into Syria where they could bolster the ranks of various VEOs, allegedly as a way to dispose of domestic extremism. The government's relationship with influential Salafist figures is also a point of local concern. For example, while the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs is sponsoring local imams and rewarding those who abide by its anti-terrorism guidelines,²⁴⁶ the initiative is proving to be less than successful. At one level it is potentially ineffective, with respondents complaining that government-trained imams are incompetent, uninspiring and even objectionable.²⁴⁷ At a second level, the initiative is inadequate. For example, despite issuing religious

²⁴³ Yom, Sean L. 2015. 'Tribal politics in contemporary Jordan: the case of the Hirak movement', *The Middle East Journal* 68 (2): 229-247.

²⁴⁴ Su, Alice 2015. 'The boy named Jihad: from the ashes of the Arab Spring to the battlefields of Syria', *The Atlantic*, June 19, 2015.

²⁴⁵ "Of course they [the government] won't announce that we supported the Nusra Front. They won't announce that we allowed smuggling. They could've stopped the smuggling but they supported them." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁴⁶ Haddad, Saleem 2014. 'Jordan combats the Islamic State by addressing domestic grievances', *European Council on Foreign Relations*, October 02, 2014.

²⁴⁷ "I find that most of the sheikhs, or those that conduct sermons are not trained completely in how to make individuals conscious. Most of their sermons are either prepared by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs or by an individual who helps them to write it. And all they do is read it out loud. They do not have the capacity to raise awareness. They

guidelines to state-appointed preachers, the government lacks the capacity to thoroughly monitor these clerics. That there were only 60 employed “monitors” for Jordan’s 6-7,000 mosques in 2014 is indicative of this.²⁴⁸ However, in the mosques that are covered by surveillance, respondents contended that the measures are effective in deterring extremists.²⁴⁹ Though this reflects a general public awareness of state surveillance, rendering it potentially useless in rooting out violent extremists, it does suggest that surveillance may be forcing violent extremists into the shadows. This could of course have its benefits as well as its dangers. Another indication of the inadequacy of the state-appointed imam scheme is that in 2014 the government was employing just 3,400 preachers to cover approximately double that number of mosques, leaving half of them dependent on “unofficial clerics”.²⁵⁰ Many of these “unofficial clerics” have demonstrated extremist tendencies, exploiting the opportunity to promote their Salafist Jihadist ideologies and campaign for VEO support.²⁵¹ With Irbid home to the second largest number of Jordan’s mosques,²⁵² the governorate is particularly exposed to this problem. Indicative of this was the initiative by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to hire Sharia judges and professors to fill Irbid’s shortage of imams during Ramadan 2015.²⁵³ In light of cases whereby local Sharia judges have joined ISIS,²⁵⁴ the provision for Sharia judges to preach to large congregations is not risk-free in terms of VE dissemination. At a third level, the state initiative is counterproductive, as its preachers continue to disseminate extremist messages to impressionable youth.²⁵⁵ This is consistent with assertions that government-appointed sheikhs across the country are publicly commending Jordanian foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria.²⁵⁶ Additionally, one respondent suggested that insufficient salaries for state-employed imams are driving some of them into the hands of VEOs where the material benefits are superior.²⁵⁷ The failure of the initiative is further illustrated in the account given by one respondent, of a young government-

have an aggressive approach, and that is why they are not liked by people...their approach is repulsive and they are not trained well.” (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁴⁸ Booth, William & Taylor Luck 2014. ‘To counter rise of Islamic State, Jordan imposes rules on Muslim clerics, The Washington Post, November 09, 2014.

²⁴⁹ “I don’t think that mosques pose any threat. We have intelligence in the mosques at all times, so it is very difficult to use mosques for such things [spreading extremist ideas].” (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁵⁰ Booth, William & Taylor Luck 2014. ‘To counter rise of Islamic State, Jordan imposes rules on Muslim clerics, The Washington Post, November 09, 2014.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Rumman, Abu Mohammad & Hassan Abu Hanieh 2013. The “Islamic solution” in Jordan: Islamists, the state and the ventures of democracy and security, Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (56).

²⁵³ The Jordan Times 2015. ‘Sharia judges, professors to cover for shortage of imams in Irbid’, The Jordan Times, June 02, 2015.

²⁵⁴ “He had a brother who came back from Syria and he was shot. His brother was with ISIS. I don’t know his story though. He was first working with the Islamic court here for ISIS, then he went to Syria. He used to put limits on people according to the Islamic law and punish them accordingly.” (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

²⁵⁵ “Friday prayers, especially when it’s legalized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs: the imam would say that adulterers should be killed and so on, and when kids hear these speeches they get affected.” (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

²⁵⁶ Hilterman, Joost 2016. ‘Jordan: how close to danger?’, The New York Review of Books, March 29, 2016.

²⁵⁷ “Since he [a JN recruit] is a mosque imam, his salary is no more than 190 JD. This is not enough for the needs of his family. He has many kids, a home, education and many more costs.” (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

employed muezzin who fled to Syria.²⁵⁸ Though the motives of the imam are unclear, the fact that there is local suspicion of state-sponsored religious figures is cause for concern. This includes the government's support for religious scholars such as Amjad Qorshah, who for some is regarded as an advocate of VE.²⁵⁹ He has also long demonstrated a significant capacity to influence youth due to his high profile and modernism. Thus, for some, the government's June 2016 arrest of Qorshah is likely to alleviate criticisms that the state is cultivating the spread of VE among youth.²⁶⁰ On the other hand, certain commentators view Qorshah as an effective CVE force, and his remarkable popularity is likely to have generated many grievances over his detention.²⁶¹

"Of course, the Jordanian government supported these groups by smuggling and releasing some of its leaders from the Salafist Jihadists, so that they were able to participate in Syria."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Unlike perceptions of central and local government, there is an overwhelming appreciation of the Royal Court, which has demonstrated a willingness and capacity to initiate positive change.

Regardless of the means, the Jordanian Royal Court has successfully won the hearts and minds of Irbid's majority. This is likely to have been facilitated by recent public developmental initiatives at a time when living standards are otherwise deteriorating across the governorate. One such initiative is the 15 million JD funding and building of the highly popular King Abdullah II Park close to Petra street in Irbid Qasabah, which opened in August 2015.²⁶² According to respondents, thousands of people attend this park at weekends from neighborhoods across the governorate. Thus, there is recognition among Irbid's majority that the Royal Court is attentive to the wellbeing of the public. For example, an overwhelming 80 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while only 16 percent agreed that the Royal Court does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 23). These figures expose the extent to which the monarchy's popularity surpasses that of the local government. Indeed, in contrast to the strong appreciation afforded the Royal Court, a considerable 40 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 51 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the local government does not care about the needs of the people (see Figure 24).

²⁵⁸ "He was a prayer-caller employed by the government, and was living in a mosque with his family. And his family receives a subsidy from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs...When he went to Syria, he went not with members of the family or from Jordan, but with other estranged family members." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁵⁹ "As for Qourshah, he is working with the government since they have given him the green light to say whatever he wants, though they should stop him. He works in the university now, and he saw that he was losing support so he became affiliated with the government." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

²⁶⁰ Azzeh, Laila 2016. 'Muslim scholar detained 'over comments on Jordan's role in anti-Daesh war', The Jordan Times, June 15, 2016.

²⁶¹ "We need to mention some of honest politicians who played a role in fighting ISIS, such as Amjad Qourshah...he was debating imprisoned extremists and he has thousands of followers. He has charisma and he is very popular among youth." (Male, 41, Freelance Researcher, Amman - on Irbid governorate)

²⁶² The Jordan Times 2015. 'Crown Prince opens major public park in Irbid', The Jordan Times, August 09, 2015.

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

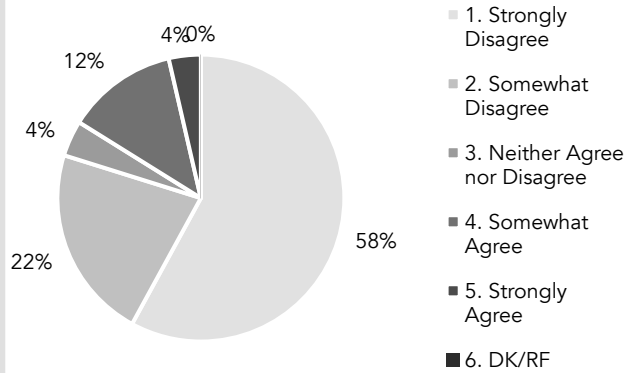
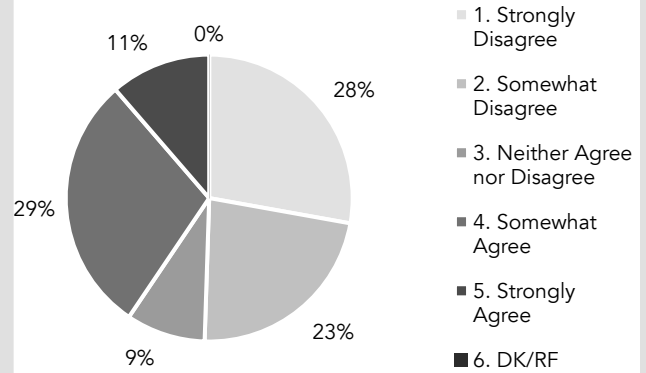


Figure 24. To what extent do you agree that the local government does not care about the needs of the people?

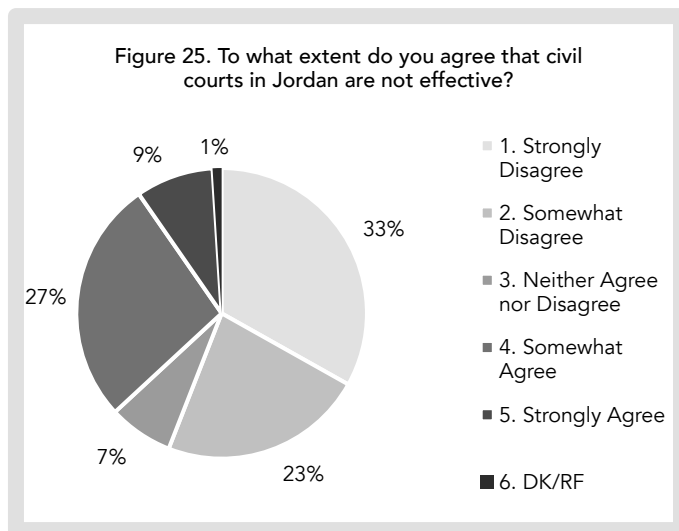


3.5 LAW ENFORCEMENT

For a significant minority, there is a degree of disaffection with civil courts, which lack the influence of local tribes and the respect of Sharia courts.

Though Irbid's civil courts are renowned for their time-consuming procedures, there is no evidence of corruption or bias within these institutions. However, the influence of Jordanian civil courts over local affairs in Irbid appears, at least on occasion, to be overshadowed by that of Sharia courts and tribal judicial proceedings. For example, in January 2016, following the fatal shooting of a 14 year-old boy in Irbid, tribal intervention rather than civil court rulings precluded violent retaliation from the victim's associates: based on tribal laws the suspect's relatives were relocated out of danger.²⁶³ Indeed, there are indications that many locals have limited faith

in the capacity and/or resolve of civil courts to enforce justice. For example, one respondent asserted that locals have a preference for bringing their cases to the Sharia court because there is a failure to uphold citizens' rights elsewhere. Quantitative findings also showed that a significant minority of locals do not have confidence in civil courts: 36 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 56 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that civil courts in Jordan are not effective (see Figure 25). The courts referred to here include the following: Irbid Court of Appeal (Irbid Qasabah), Irbid Court of First Instance (Irbid Qasabah), Al Wastiyah Magistrate Court, Al Aghwar Shamaliyah Magistrate Court, Ramtha Magistrate Court, Bani Obeid Court and Al Mazar Shamali Magistrate Court.



"The ones who think they are right, they will go to the government for help and it won't help. So they go to alternatives, like turning to Islamic courts here to take their rights.

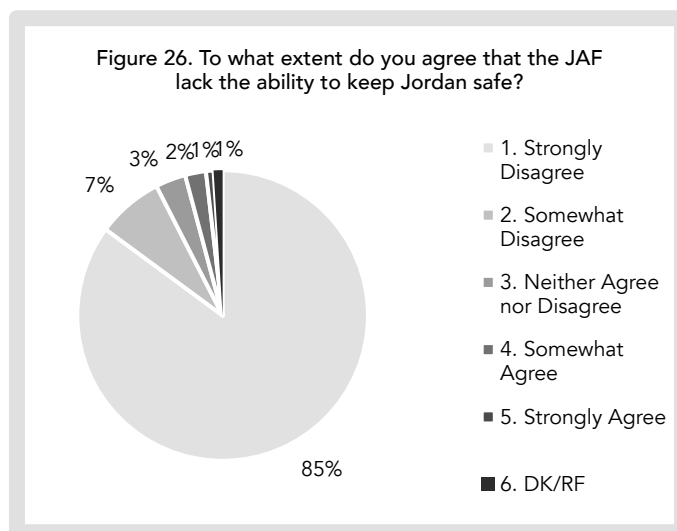
(Male, 25, Media Activist, Irbid)

²⁶³ Young Professionals in Foreign Policy 2016. 'Tribal customary law in Jordan: sign of a weak state or opportunity for legal pluralism', The Huffington Post, June 15, 2016.

The JAF and central security apparatus have a reputation for vigilance, and receive high levels of cooperation from the public.

Some locals dismiss the idea that VEOs pose a serious security threat. This attitude is largely based on the belief that the JAF and central government security are sufficiently attentive and equipped to quell any opposition groups in the area.²⁶⁴ The visible intensification of security measures in response to heightened terrorist threats is one demonstration of this capacity. For example, respondents noted that since September 2015 the government has increased the number of checkpoints at which the security services screen (male) drivers and bus passengers on the highway between Irbid and Amman,²⁶⁵ especially between Al Husn and Irbid City. The government's increased border controls have

also contributed to public security assurance, notably since early 2015.²⁶⁶ It is unsurprising therefore, that an overwhelming 92 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while just three percent strongly or somewhat agreed that the JAF lack the ability to keep Jordan safe (see Figure 26). Accordingly, there is an incredibly high level of appreciation for the JAF, which was also captured in quantitative findings: 93 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while four percent strongly or somewhat agreed that the JAF do not behave in a respectful way (see Figure 27). This reputation of competence and decency extends to the GID surveillance operations, such as those that monitor extremist activities on the Internet. The short case study below provides an example of how such surveillance has been effective in Irbid. Beyond toleration and appreciation of these measures, and contrary to complaints of excessive surveillance and security intrusion (see section 4.3 Human Rights and Civil Liberties), several respondents called for the extension of surveillance in their community. They claimed that with the increasing threat posed by VEOs, it is even necessary for privacy rights to be compromised if this facilitates the GID. This was with particular reference to social media platforms including Facebook and WhatsApp.²⁶⁷ There is also a degree of public cooperation with the GID in



²⁶⁴ "I don't think that they [VEOs] pose a threat to Jordan because our government is strong and can overcome such groups. So it is so hard for these groups to cause a threat to the country." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

²⁶⁵ "The government has taken various security measures. For example, if someone is travelling from Irbid to Amman they are now subject to a search at numerous checkpoints along the way. Here, the names of all passengers are screened for criminal records, and they can be arrested." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁶⁶ "Now it's not as easy [to travel to Syria]: the borders are watched, especially after Moath Al Kasasbeh died." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

²⁶⁷ "We need to monitor Facebook and other social media outlets because they [VEOs] focus and target youth - especially teenagers. It is very easy to target them on social media and to play with their minds. Even though initially personal freedoms do not allow for such monitoring, in such a security situation that we are facing, we need to

exposing extremist activities. An illustration of this is the incident in November 2015 whereby an individual informed on an alleged extremist circle of Syrian women running a Qur'anic memorization center (see also section 5.4 Exposure to VE and Perceptions of VEO Threat). Calls for intensified surveillance may also derive from relatively lower levels of faith in the capacity of local police: a considerable minority of 31 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 65 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the police are not reliable (see Figure 28).

"Yes the government is very successful in fighting terrorism, even though we have had some rare events occur in recent times by some extremists. The Jordanian intelligence directorate is very aware; they are very well trained and you will not find someone that is disrespectful, unaware or incapable in the Jordanian intelligence services."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Figure 27. To what extent do you agree that the JAF do not behave in a respectful way?

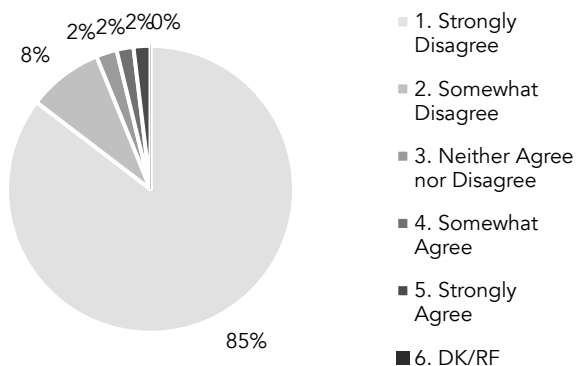
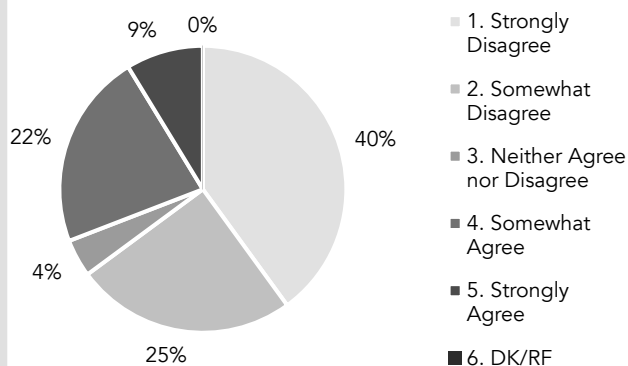


Figure 28. To what extent do you agree that the police are not reliable?



monitor all social media because we do not know what our children could be doing on these networks." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Focus: GID intercepts VEO Facebook grooming of local young man.

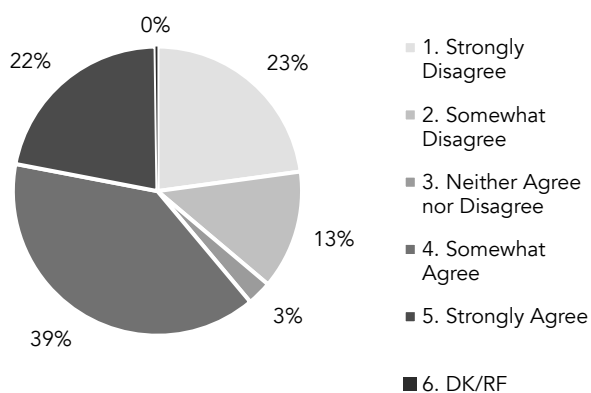
"I know of a case of my neighbor's son. He was a religious person, always sharing religious posts on Facebook. He was university educated, he had his own business, and his family and he were very well off financially; they were not in need of money at all. But a member of these groups [VEOs] was monitoring him, and they tried to lure him. The young man began to change his ideology. But thanks to the intervention by the security forces and the National Intelligence Agency's monitoring of Facebook, they told his parents that their son was in contact with a Daesh member. His parents informed him and forbade him from speaking to them [the VEOs]. He was 27/28 years old. He was really knowledgeable about religion, more than others, but he wasn't an extremist or strict."

(Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

Many locals mistrust the government and the GID due to their perceived exaggeration of VE threats and organizational opacity.

The majority of respondents suggested that the Jordanian government is guilty of deceit at some level. This was expressed in relation to the local anti-terrorist raid in early March 2016. Several respondents were skeptical of government claims that the suspects were planning to attack civilians, and that they were affiliated with ISIS.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, they questioned why the incident received so much coverage compared with past security threats. An additional criticism in relation to this event is that the GID reaction was disproportionate to the threat. One respondent claimed that because there were only a handful of suspects with minor links to ISIS, the government's decision to mount an armed military operation was an overreaction. A more serious accusation expressed by several respondents is that the suspects had no terrorist ambitions whatsoever, but were targeted simply for holding strong religious beliefs and weapons. Furthermore, there is a widespread belief that the exaggerated security reaction could be explained by the government's desire to generate approval among locals through security spectacles. Accordingly, several respondents interpreted the incident as a propaganda stunt aimed at showcasing

Figure 29. To what extent do you agree that ISIS is a threat to Jordan?



²⁶⁸ "When the events of Irbid occurred, some people said that those that carried out the operation belonged to Daesh, some said they were Salafists. Nobody knows the truth." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

government opposition to ISIS,²⁶⁹ generating support for the state's participation in the international coalition and reversing the government's negative local reputation. Regardless of the government's motives concerning the March 2016 Irbid raid, the considerable public attention surrounding the incident has served to amplify the perceived threat of ISIS among residents. For example, many respondents cited the incident as demonstrable of ISIS's presence within Irbid, and subsequently the existence of a VE hazard. Quantitative findings encapsulated the prevalence of these feelings that ISIS represents an immediate local danger: 61 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 36 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that ISIS is a threat to Jordan (see Figure 29). The sizeable minority that disagreed were most likely those with the greatest levels of confidence in the capabilities of Jordan's security apparatus.

"In my opinion these people aren't with Daesh, and they are not connected with Daesh. There are a lot of operations, and a lot of bombing attempts that the intelligence caught and didn't announce. For example, I sat down with someone who told me that in the past, a bombing was about to happen in a court and no one heard about it - just the intelligence knew about it. Then why didn't they announce it? Because this person was not an Arab and not a Muslim, and didn't belong to any political party. But because these people [Irbid raid suspects] are considered like the Muslim Brotherhood and they are strict Muslims, they [the GID] said let's attribute it to Daesh."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

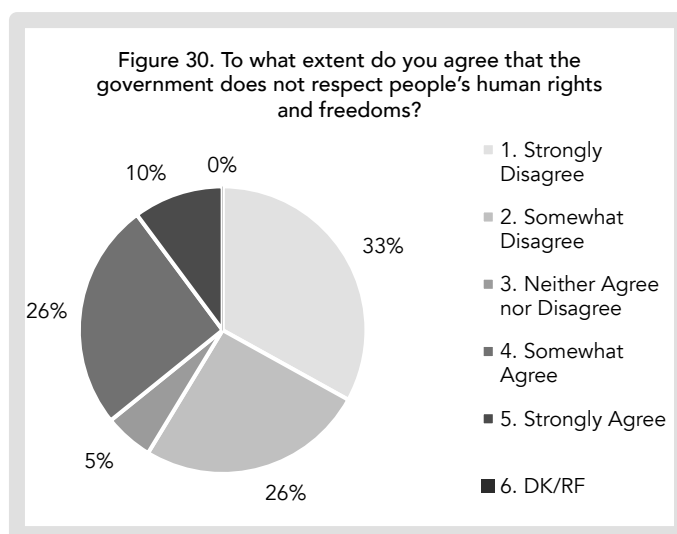
²⁶⁹ "It announced the names and the persons to attribute them to Daesh, and to show the people that they are working against Daesh." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

3.6 HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Excessive GID social intrusion and anti-extremism laws risk aggravating locals and fueling Salafist Jihadist support.

The flipside of the GID's vigilance – its intensive surveillance and interrogation methods – is that in some communities it is creating disquiet. Several respondents indicated that such intrusive tactics are at best ineffective and at worst counter-productive, potentially aggravating residents. The case of an individual who returned from Syria where he had been aligned with JN exemplifies this. According to several respondents, after enduring imprisonment, interrogation and intense surveillance upon his return to Irbid,²⁷⁰ he remained equally ideologically committed but became deeply disturbed,²⁷¹ eventually being driven to attempted suicide.²⁷² In this respect, the government's security methods

are potentially counter-productive, further intensifying hostility toward the state. This hostility has also been generated following mass arrests of Salafists, including elements in Irbid.²⁷³ As one respondent articulated, the government is creating internal Jordanian enemies, which generates greater support for anti-government Salafist Jihadist and Islamist groups within the area.²⁷⁴ Several additional factors potentially aggravate these perceptions, one of which is the central government's introduction of new anti-terrorism measures in April 2014, ostensibly in response to the increasing threat posed by VEOs in the region.²⁷⁵ Though the new measures facilitate a more rigorous level of surveillance, some locals



²⁷⁰ "When he came back here, and when the security took him, they asked him where he had been, why he was going to Turkey, and why he came back. They definitely have information that he was in Syria. He was in prison for 21 days, and when he left we contacted him and saw that he was still strict and conservative." (Male, 28 Computer Engineer, Irbid)

²⁷¹ "He came back again to Jordan and lived his life, but the Jordanian intelligence kept him uncomfortable, calling him back and forth to the extent that he used to get a call every two to three days." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁷² "The intelligence told him that he had 48 hours to give himself in, or 24 otherwise they would take his wife. I am not sure of this information. This is what I heard. At the same time there was a threat from the groups that he was with. We do not know if they are ISIS or Nusra Front or whoever. They told him that if he gave himself in they would take his wife or anyone from his family. So he was caught between two fires until he reached the point of burning himself." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

²⁷³ Jo, Ahmed 2014. 'Jordanian authorities arrest ISIS, Nusra Front suspects', Pakistan Defence, August 30, 2014.

²⁷⁴ "Most of the Salafists and jihadi currents, as well as the Nusra Front and Daesh all came from Jordan, or most of their members are Jordanians. This is because the Jordanian government and the Jordanian intelligence are creating enemies." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁷⁵ Abuqudairi, Areej 2014. 'Jordan anti-terrorism law sparks concern', Al Jazeera, April 25, 2014.

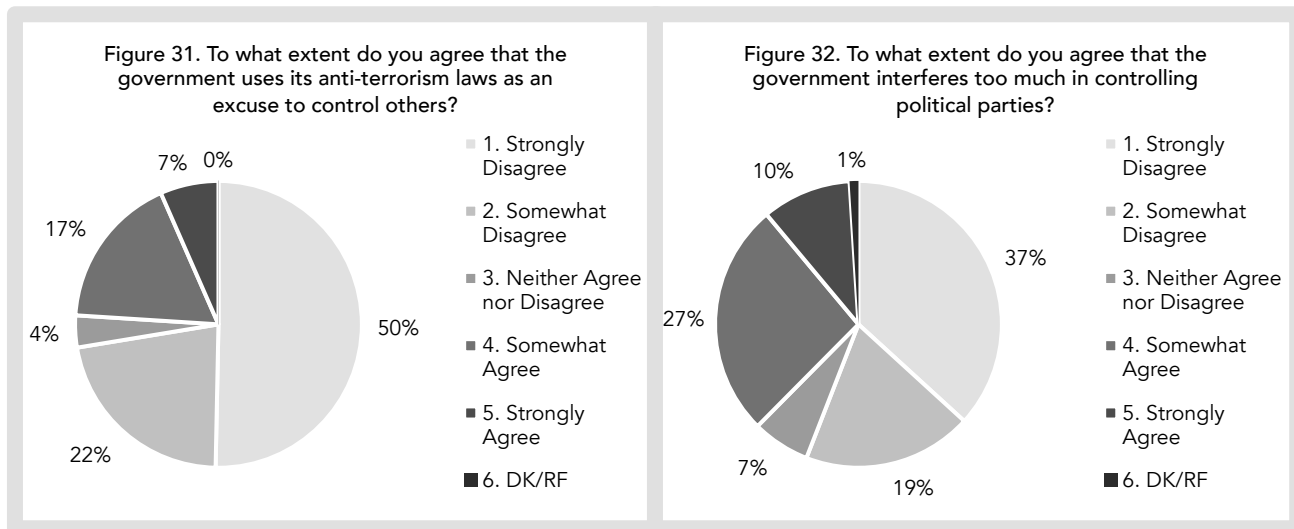
perceive this as intrusive if not repressive, and the punishments as excessive. Accordingly, a sizeable minority of 36 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 59 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the government does not respect people's human rights and freedoms (see Figure 30). One issue is that certain aspects of the amended laws are somewhat ambiguous, leaving some residents confused, bewildered and indignant. For example, soon after the new law was passed, a local youth was arrested and tried on highly questionable charges and unsubstantiated evidence following accusations that he had shown support for ISIS through Facebook.²⁷⁶ Additionally, due to a perceived intolerance of anti-regime criticism, there is significant wariness among the public when discussing the state and the monarchy.²⁷⁷ However, there is not a widespread belief in Irbid that the government is using the anti-terrorism laws simply as a controlling mechanism: 72 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 24 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that the government uses its anti-terrorism laws as an excuse to control others (see Figure 31). Another factor that may be aggravating resentment toward the state to the benefit of VEOs and Salafist Jihadists is the extent of the government's political intervention. For example, the aforementioned closure of MB headquarters within Irbid and across the country (see section 2.2 Support for Political and Non-violent Islamist Groups) risks antagonizing the organization's supporters and driving them into the hands of more extreme factions. Indeed, quantitative findings indicated that a considerable minority of locals already deem the state's political meddling to be excessive: 37 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 56 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the government interferes too much in controlling political parties (see Figure 32).

"I believe that our government is behind what happened in Irbid...It felt like you were in a war or something. When I went to the place where the shooting happened, I saw that the building was all shot with bullets from outside though only five people were inside. I know that it's for our own good that the police get them but not in this way. The government does this because it wants the people to approve of them going against the Syrian government in a war. There were two guys with the group who were very normal people - one who sells sweets and one unemployed. After a while it was discovered that only two guys were connected to ISIS. They didn't want to conduct a terrorist operation. They are just religious people who have weapons in Jordan. But these days anyone can get them [weapons]."

(Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

²⁷⁶ Booth, William and Taylor Luck 2014. 'Jordan cracks down on Islamic State on Facebook and Twitter', The Washington Post, October 13, 2014.

²⁷⁷ "Many believe that the government is a red line [not] to cross, and you cannot talk bad things about the king." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)



VEOs and Salafist Jihadists are capitalizing on shaky perceptions of state repression and social intrusion.

VEOs have reportedly been actively inflaming and capitalizing on anti-state attitudes relating to social intrusion by publicly criticizing the security services for conducting indiscriminate surveillance, policing and punishment.²⁷⁸ One example of such anti-state encouragement within the Turkman neighborhood in November 2013. Here, locals held a “martyr’s wedding” for an individual named Ahmed Fakhouri who died after returning injured from fighting in Syria. At the time, this was one of the few occasions whereby a family explicitly hosted the event as a “martyrs wedding” - in this case, the decision was based on the family’s contention that Fakhouri was murdered by the GID upon his return, rather than the (by that time) less acceptable circumstance of dying as a VEO combatant (see section 5.4 Exposure to VE and Perceptions of VEO threat). Members of both the MB and Salafist Jihadist current attended the event to demonstrate their solidarity with victims of perceived government misconduct, and thus emphasized their anti-state positions. An additional undesirable consequence of intensive security measures is that former VEO recruits returning to their home communities are afraid to discuss their experiences.²⁷⁹ This inhibits the opportunity for locals to gain a first-hand understanding of the radicalization process, which could otherwise help to protect and deter youth from VE influences. Regardless of their attitudes toward GID surveillance, respondents did acknowledge that intensified security measures have successfully reduced the number of local foreign fighters entering Syria and Iraq.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the criticisms of intrusive security measures highlighted here are largely based on respondents’ secondary observations rather than

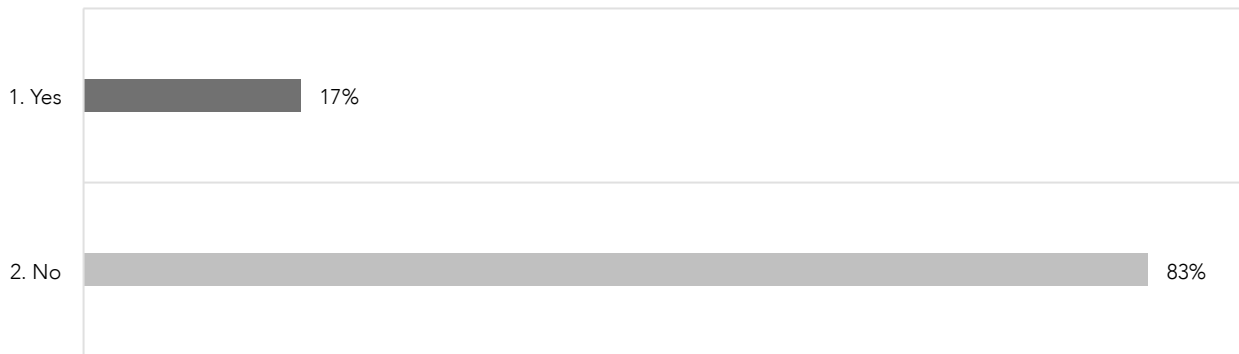
²⁷⁸ Open Source Enterprise 2016. ‘Pathways to radicalization among Jordanian youth’, 2016.

²⁷⁹ “Those youths who return, they do not dare to speak about their experience; they prefer to be silent because they are fearful.” (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁸⁰ “No one can deny the militancy of security in the recent period. And actually, the incidence of people joining groups in Iraq and Syria has reduced. Before this, the borders were easy to cross and I heard that it was easy for them to go to Syria.” (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

personal encounters. For instance, only 17 percent of Irbid GQ respondents agreed, while 83 percent disagreed that they or their family had directly suffered from excessive police authority (see Figure 33).

Figure 33. Have you or your family directly suffered from excessive police authority?

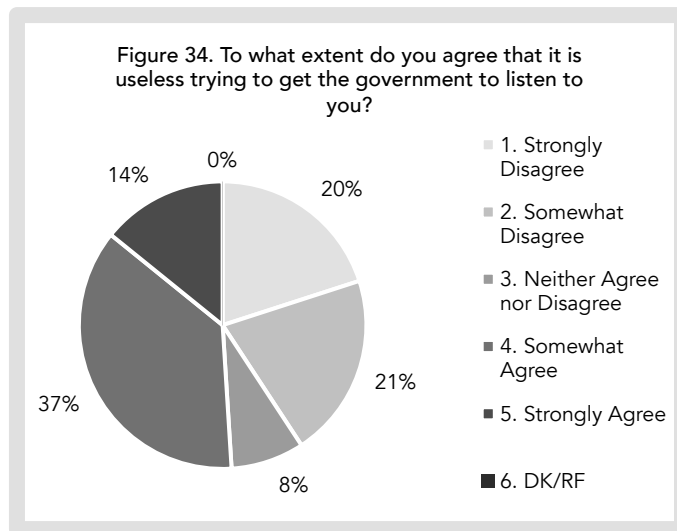


4.0 PSYCHOSOCIAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

4.1 LOCUS OF CONTROL

The central government 's behavior is fueling grievances as it is widely seen as unresponsive to local needs and some accuse it of outright neglect of the governorate.

The majority of respondents laid heavy criticism on the government for permitting deprivation to increase in Irbid. Along with southern governorates like Ma'an, locals perceive northern areas such as theirs to have been especially affected by government economic neglect, leading to social insecurity. Linked to this is a widespread feeling of political disregard from the state. For example, 51 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 41 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that it is useless trying to get the government to listen to them (see Figure 34). Similarly, and even more strikingly, 56 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed,



while 38 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that they do not feel that there is a point in voting, as it doesn't change anything (see Figure 35). Some locals claim that socio-economic discrimination can explain why it is in governorates like theirs where VEOs and Salafist Jihadists have been particularly successful in realizing their ambitions.²⁸¹ These groups are able to aggravate and capitalize on local grievances against the government by presenting themselves as anti-state entities that protect the interests of marginalized citizens.²⁸² Meanwhile, manipulative actors are able to exploit a socio-economic void and win support through social engagement and material provision.²⁸³ Indeed, respondents indicated that some locals are looking for any opportunity to escape their current circumstances,²⁸⁴ leaving them highly vulnerable to VEO recruitment. However, it is a minority of locals who feel justified in

²⁸¹ "The places where the public is more marginalized and there is less attention from the government - they will be more exposed and suitable for planting such groups [VEOs]." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

²⁸² "They generated a grudge against the government. So I see these things, that it justifies hatred against the government. People join these groups and say, 'I'm with religion so I'm always right,' and so on. And at the same time they see that they [these groups] are anti-government." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁸³ "As for Irbid, there are 500,000 Syrian and Palestinian refugees and there are 500 villages neglected. I lived in the northern part for 13 years: if an electricity lamp fell it would get fixed after four years and troublemakers would take charge. They don't have good streets or schools or development." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

²⁸⁴ "When this country provides for me then I would care about it and stop any enemy that tries to reach it. But me as a person, I don't have an allegiance. It's taking from me and not giving me anything in return, so I don't care about it. When the first chance comes outside of it I will be out." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

pursuing revenge for their detriment. For example, only 29 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 67 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that it is better to die in revenge than live on in shame (see Figure 36). One respondent argued that far from alleviating these dynamics, the government has continued to divide society by employing scare tactics against potential dissenters.²⁸⁵ For locals, this sends a “with us or against us” message, further encouraging them to side with Salafist Jihadists and VEOs. Meanwhile, most respondents felt that the government’s economic capacity is weakening and therefore locals are becoming increasingly alienated.

“What’s in the capital is more than what’s in the northern villages or the southern villages. Here they feel hostility toward the government because there is no equality between citizens, and here security becomes different. Like I told you, wherever there is justice there is security, and here with the Jordanian government there is no justice.”

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Figure 35. To what extent do you agree that you do not feel that there is a point in voting, as it doesn’t change anything?

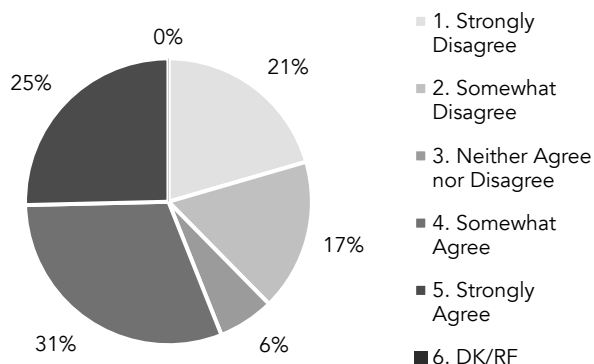
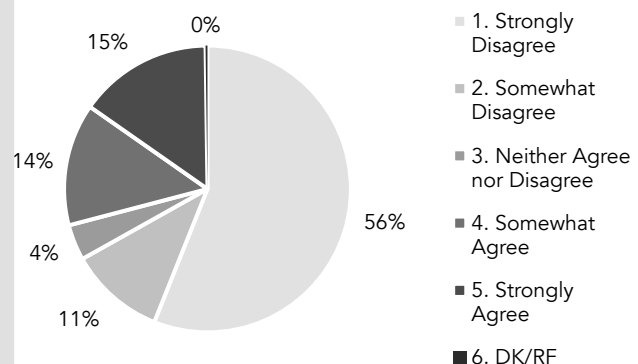


Figure 36. To what extent do you agree that it is better to die in revenge than live on in shame?



The majority sees religious extremism as a problem and families and friends of vulnerable locals feel ill-equipped and ill-prepared to prevent their radicalization.

Though family relationships are influential in transmitting extremist ideas (see section 5.2 Religious Values, Attitudes and Beliefs), many moderate-leaning families were seen as powerless to deter their relatives from turning toward VEOs. Likewise, friends have a poor record of restraining their companions’ extremist tendencies. Respondents indicated several reasons for this. First, families and friends have been unable to detect signs of VE in the early stages of radicalization, if at all. One respondent illustrated this,

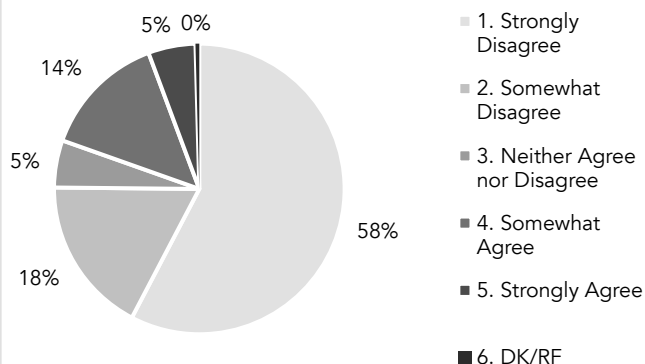
²⁸⁵ “The Jordanian regime started to use scare tactics against the people – ‘if you people don’t stand with the government you will face the same consequences as the other people who revolted, and this and that will happen to you.’ (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

lamenting his inability to react to a friend's extremist predisposition before it was too late.²⁸⁶ In another case – detailed in the case study below – a local woman inadvertently assisted her husband in his venture to join ISIS in Syria.

Both cases expose family members and friends as unreceptive to the symptoms of extremism. Quantitative findings potentially substantiated this observation, revealing that the majority of locals do not recognize religious extremism to be an issue in their locality despite evidence that Irbid – along with Zarqa and Ma'an – accommodates a disproportionately large number of Salafist Jihadists.²⁸⁷ For example, an overwhelming 76 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while only 19 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that religious extremism is a problem in their community (see Figure 37). A second reason why prospective violent extremists are bypassing families and friends is that even if

families and friends are able to recognize signs of extremism, they lack the knowledge of how best to confront it. For example, one respondent lamented that many parents have a poor understanding of the radicalization process and respond with punitive measures rather than constructive dialogue.²⁸⁸ One respondent also highlighted the superior ability of extremist recruiters to exert influence over youths compared with local friends and family.²⁸⁹ For some, this relative helplessness has fueled a degree of cynicism and the idea that friends and family should be absolved of responsibility to prevent extremism.²⁹⁰ Similarly, many local youths tend to feel powerless in relation to their friends' extremist

Figure 37. To what extent do you agree that religious extremism is a problem in your community?



²⁸⁶ "I blame myself because I couldn't reach to him and convince him that what he left to is a mistake, and I am convinced that I would have been able to change his point of view...the problem is that when they leave, they leave all of a sudden...I blame the people that were in contact with him in the last period. They of course didn't know that he was leaving, and they failed to pay attention to the fact that he diverted to extremism. And everyone knew that he is committed and even extra strict." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

²⁸⁷ Al Sharif, Osama 2016. 'As external threats recede, Jordan left to face inner demons', Al Monitor, June 16, 2016.

²⁸⁸ "When we want to solve something we do it the wrong way. I think if my family who do not believe in radicalism saw their son becoming extremist they would hit him or forbid him from going out. But communication is not present here and they do not know why a person would become radical." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

²⁸⁹ "We told him to come back. We did what we had to do and more, and we tried to guide him to the right path. But he had personal beliefs in his character, and as I told you there are people who influenced him more than we did." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

²⁹⁰ "This is a personal choice, his family and friends have nothing to do with it... Stop him? No, it's not possible." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

dispositions, and lack faith in their abilities to influence them.²⁹¹ While acknowledging these failures, the majority of respondents maintained that friends, and especially family, nonetheless have a role to play in combating the influence of VEOs upon locals, and thus share a responsibility in CVE. Accordingly, some respondents leveled much of the blame for VE on local parents for neglecting to raise their children responsibly and monitor their personal and social lives.²⁹² In certain respects, residents regard the responsibility of the family as a microcosm of that of a nanny state – to inform, protect, provide, monitor and set a positive example. Accordingly, families are subject to much blame for the development of VE among their relatives.²⁹³

"The family should fear for its child, girl or boy, in their 20s or in their 30s. These groups can target anyone with a weakness. Family should establish the true morals and rules of Islam; we cannot kill each other just because we are different. It is the parents' duty to raise their children...The good family raises its child on the correct beliefs from the beginning; it is a main factor in protecting young people from all bad behavior like terrorism or drug use."

(Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

Focus: A local example of a trusting spouse who is blind to her husband's extremist ambitions.

"She was married to a Jordanian man and had three children. Then her husband started treating her differently; he banned her from doing everything, he didn't like anything and he became religiously strict. Three or four months later he asked her for her gold so that he could sell it. She asked him why. He said that he wanted to get money to start a project so that they could have a stable income for the house. She said yes and gave him her gold, which he sold. He took all the money for himself and left her very little money for the house and children. What is interesting is that the husband's mother knew exactly where her son was going and what he intended to do. All his brothers also knew. So everyone knew except the wife and kids. And his whole family supported him and encouraged him to go. He told his wife that he was going to a foreign country to start a business there, and then when the situation was stable he would come to fetch her and the children. Before travelling, he left her a very small amount of money - not more than 200 JD in an envelope - so that she could spend it on herself and the kids for a month or two until he came back to get them. Days passed, and it had been four months. The wife asked her husband's mother

²⁹¹ "I don't think that friends can help either, and they don't care if their friend goes to fight. I don't know of a certain example but I know this happens in general. I think if a person wanted to go to fight he would not tell his friends about it." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

²⁹² "If someone goes to Syria the family is the first to blame because if the parents raise their children the right way, it is very difficult to lure them. If something is wrong with their upbringing, then it can be very easy to recruit them." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

²⁹³ "We can also blame an individual's family or friends, especially because the family should always monitor the children and not give them full freedom." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

about him. So the mother replied that she would know later on, and that her husband would make money for them. After some time, her husband talked to her and explained everything. He joined ISIS and he couldn't say more. He said that he regrets it, and that he misses his children. He joined ISIS in Syria, and then when ISIS felt that he was planning to escape and go back to Jordan, they killed him." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

4.2 RELIGIOUS VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

There is a notable degree of respect for the Christian community in Irbid and a willingness to cooperate with them to raise awareness of radical groups.

As Irbid is a hotbed for the takfirist "Zarqawi wing" of Jordan's Salafist Jihadists,²⁹⁴ it is not altogether surprising that the governorate has witnessed violent hostility from elements of the movement toward religious minorities. In July 2008, for example, 12 residents were arrested and detained after launching a terrorist attack on a local Latin church and a Christian cemetery.²⁹⁵ However, such incidents are uncommon, and less aggressive voices from Jordan's Salafist Jihadist movement, such as Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi, have even urged followers to refrain from attacking churches.²⁹⁶ This position correlates more closely with the attitude of many respondents on the subject of religious minority groups in their communities. Those who discussed the topic spoke positively about the Christian religion, highlighting its cultivation of compassion – something they regarded as a common value to Islam and Christianity.²⁹⁷ Several respondents also recognized the historical legacy of Christians in Jordan, and expressed pride in their peaceful co-existence with them.²⁹⁸ Positive attitudes toward Christians were also revealed when discussing Hamas, whose supposed tolerance of Christians in Gaza is a cause for celebration (See section 2.1 Support for VEOs).²⁹⁹ Correspondingly, the perceived unjustified and un-Islamic mistreatment of religious minorities by VEOs such as JN and ISIS accounts for some of the rejection of these groups. Indeed, one respondent substantiated this opinion with reference to the Prophet Mohammad's personal life,³⁰⁰ claiming that religious tolerance is an essential Islamic value.³⁰¹ In particular, many respondents objected to the practice of forceful religious imposition upon others, as revealed in discussions of VEOs and non-violent Islamist groups (See section 2.0 Islamist and VEO

²⁹⁴ Batal al-Shishani, Murad 2009. 'Al-Zarqawi's legacy seen in trial of Jordanian al-Qaeda cell', The Jamestown Foundation, February 06, 2009.

²⁹⁵ Batal Al-Shishani, Murad 2009. 'Neo-Zarqawists target the Arab-Christians of Jordan', The Jamestown Foundation, November 13, 2009.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ "The Islamic religion is a religion of love as is the Christian religion." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

²⁹⁸ "We have lived our lives with Christians and there is no discrimination." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

²⁹⁹ "People there [in Gaza] do what they want. Muslims and Christians live side by side." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁰⁰ "There are groups in Syria that are all for the killing of Christians for no reason. This has nothing to do with religion because the Prophet married a Christian woman and let her be, and keep her own religion." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁰¹ "We need to respect people's religions. If not, that means we ourselves are not true Muslims." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Support). Reflective of this was the fact that 75 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 19 percent disagreed that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose (see Figure 38). Several respondents also stressed the importance of cooperation between local Muslims and Christians in order to raise awareness and combat VE in their communities.³⁰² These views were partially, but not entirely, reflected in quantitative findings. For example, 65 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 31 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims (see Figure 39).

"As for Christians, radical groups call them infidels and [say] they must be killed along with Shiites. They kill everyone and even Al Nusra kill Christians. It's impossible to have this in Jordan. Christians and Muslims live side by side here. Christians play a big role in spreading awareness through churches and they spread love and compassion among people in Jordan. They love Muslims even if they are different."

(Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

Figure 38. To what extent do you think that all people should be free to practice whatever religion they choose?

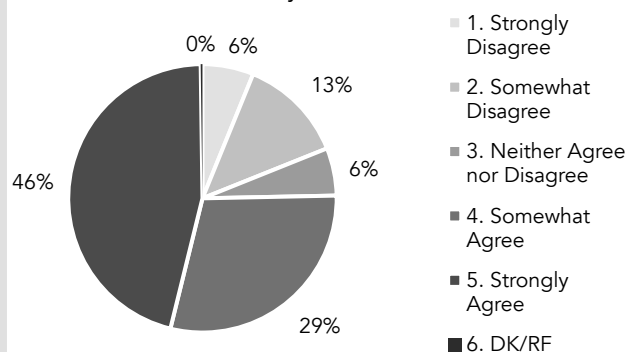
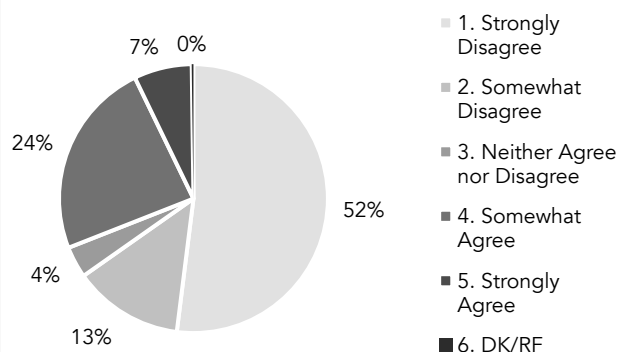


Figure 39. To what extent do you think that Muslims should avoid interacting with non-Muslims?



Respondents believe familial and kinship ties, especially in the Salafist Jihadist community, are often key to radicalization and eventual VEO participation.

The majority of respondents indicated that local Salafist families are creating environments conducive to VE tendencies among children and youth. VE influences may pass between various elements of the family structure,³⁰³ including through brothers. For example, one local AQ member, active at least since Abu

³⁰² "We all need to play a role - Christians, Muslims, Jordanians, Palestinians. Raising awareness must be inclusive, without any discrimination." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁰³ "With respect to families, we are not only speaking about an individual family member or just a mother or a father. Even if any of the siblings are members of a Salafist group or any conservative group, they can impact other siblings in one way or another." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

Musab Al Zarqawi's leadership, is thought to have radicalized his younger brother to join a VEO in Syria.³⁰⁴ It was with particular emphasis on the father-son relationship however, that respondents suggested violent Islamist ideologies are inherited. For example, one respondent referred to the case of a local youth who was indoctrinated with Salafist Jihadist ideas through his AQ-affiliated father before joining JN in Syria. Another respondent recalled the case of a Salafist Jihadist's teenage son from the Hanina neighborhood who was recruited by ISIS and fought for the organization in Mosul. Though the father may not have been complicit in his son's recruitment, his endorsement was implied when he celebrated his son's martyrdom after hearing news of his death as an ISIS combatant (see below 'Focus'). While fathers are clearly capable of exerting an extremist influence on their sons, it is less clear how youths take the step from ideological extremism to joining VEOs. For instance, commenting on the aforementioned case, the same respondent could not explain with certainty how the youth came to join JN, whether it was through his AQ-affiliated father's encouragement, the organization's recruitment campaigning or both.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, children who have been radically influenced by their fathers do not necessarily join the same VEOs as their parent. For instance, one respondent cited the case of a "Zarqawist" who radicalized his son, who subsequently joined JN rather than Zarqawi-associated ISIS.³⁰⁶ Thus, while intra-family ideological influences may be strong, organizational commitments are not necessarily inherited. Ramtha, where the population has almost doubled since the beginning of the Syrian conflict,³⁰⁷ is particularly relevant with regard to the transmission of extremist influences through families. Here, the local population has kinship ties with people from the neighboring Syrian city of Dara'a, many of whom have been fleeing the conflict in their hometown since 2012 and seeking refuge in Ramtha.³⁰⁸ One respondent claimed that the people of Dara'a, who purportedly share traditions and customs with locals in Irbid, are exceptionally conservative in their religious observance. Refugees from the city are also thought to be using their kinship ties in Ramtha to exert extremist influences on youth and recruit them into VEOs.

"There are many inter-marriages between the people of Dara'a and Ramtha. The majority of the people of Dara'a that came to Jordan are considered to be very strictly religious. They recruit youths and influence them - not only with religion and money, but they also use the family linkage. So Jordanians consider that the people of Syria who are being killed are their family - their relatives. That is why they are easily recruited." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁰⁴ "We knew he was with Al Qa'ida because he was caught... He was from my extended family and he affected his little brother a lot which made him go to Syria to fight, but it wasn't known with whom. He is still there and we don't know anything about him." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁰⁵ "The son whose father was in Al Qa'ida and now fights in Syria: in the beginning he lived as a normal kid, but when he grew up he started adopting his father's way of thinking...So confusion started with him, and he started changing in terms of how he deals with others. But why did he go to Syria I don't know. Has he been lured or did his father convince him?" (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁰⁶ "The father was caught and has been in prison until this moment because he planned to help Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. And now his son, who is my friend, is fighting in Syria. He was with Al Nusra Front. He was raised with terrorism because of his father." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁰⁷ Azzeh, Laila 2016. 'Northern municipalities "struggling to cope with refugee influx"', The Jordan Times, August 18, 2016.

³⁰⁸ Al Samadi, Tamer 2012. 'Displaced Syrians in Jordan: "Syria smells of death"', Al Monitor, July 25, 2012.

Focus: Celebrating the death of a “martyred” son.

“He was my neighbor and he used to play with my brothers. He was 13 years old. I was at home in Irbid and my dad was offered sweets from someone but he refused them. When I asked him why, he said that the son of some the man got killed in Iraq and I became upset, wondering why his father was happy about it. His son was killing people with ISIS in Mosul. This happened in winter. As I know, the boy was at the mosque in front of our house: Sadiq Amin Mosque. The boy was playing football with other boys in the area in front of the mosque and he suddenly disappeared. There were people who work as religious clerks and they came to the mosque and talked to his father. They told him that they had to take his son to go to jihad, so they took him and trained him. His father became strangely happy when his son died in Mosul, and he said he was a martyr. The father is a Salafist Jihadist. The clerks sat with the father to talk to him but the father was already a Salafist and he believes in them.

A while ago the police arrested a group in Irbid and he was among them. The group was in Hanina, Irbid. They told the son about jihad and he of course believed in it because of his father. So he then joined them. His father didn’t say how he went there. After only two days the boy went with them because he was already poisoned with their ideology. When he died his parents threw a celebration and gave sweets to people, but I don’t know more details of this. My father didn’t go because he was against this and he was sad about the boy who died. They [the religious clerks] didn’t want to take the father with them because they needed him here so they took his son instead. They don’t take older men to fight because they can stay here and convince other people to join the groups. The father was happy that his son died and he didn’t see it as a sacrifice. He thinks that his son will go to heaven. I don’t know how he got to Iraq. He conducted an explosion in Mosul. They convinced the boy to do that by telling him about heaven and seeing the angels, and also by telling him that he is killing bad people - this is how they brainwash them.”

(Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

Many see no alternative source of religious legitimacy to VEOs and Salafist Jihadists.

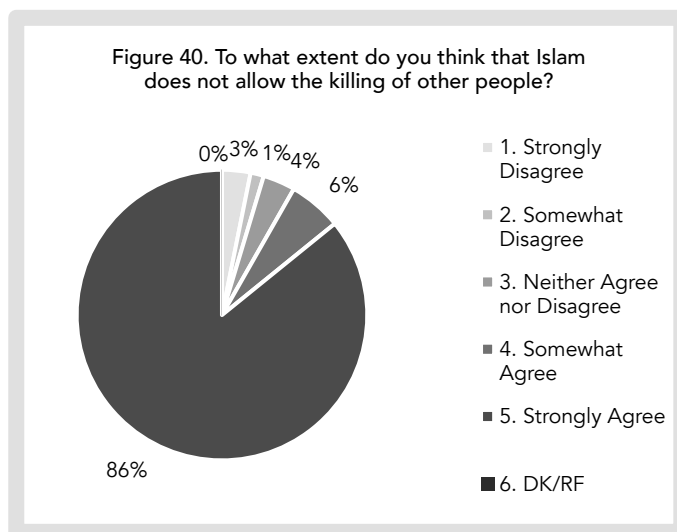
Discernible across respondents’ answers was the notion that religious figures associating themselves with the government are illegitimate. (For more on government-appointed clerics, see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance.) These attitudes derive largely from the perception that the government is unrepresentative of Islam.³⁰⁹ They also reinforce the idea promoted by extremists that the only credible Islamic representatives are those associated with Salafist Jihadism. One such popular religious leader is the Saudi sheikh, Mohammed Al Arifi,³¹⁰ who delivered a public lecture to thousands of people in Irbid

³⁰⁹ “I blame them because they are with the regimes. I mean, they preach to us religiousness but they know themselves that these regimes are wrong. And they are religious preachers who know deep inside that all of these regimes are against religion.” (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

³¹⁰ “Arifi: he has a lot of media outlets that he can speak from. He doesn’t speak politics but he preaches, and he says may God empower our Sunni brothers and make them victorious.” (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Municipality Field in July 2015 upon invitation by Irbid Municipality and the Al Irteqa Society.³¹¹ According to commentators, Al Arfi used this opportunity to aggravate sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims, and to boost his support base among local youth. Because of the importance of religion within local society, a consequence of extremist religious leaders' social predominance it that citizens are pledging support to Salafist Jihadist groups and VEOs due to their perceived Islamic supremacy. Many respondents confirmed this, with some asserting that religion was potentially the most significant factor driving VEO recruitment.³¹² (For further discussion on VE religious messaging, see section 7.0 Communication Drivers and Barriers.) Additionally, VEO members and Salafist Jihadists are actively amplifying the perceptions outlined above. They have done this by presenting themselves first and foremost as religious organizations, and by reportedly attempting to instill feelings of infidelity into more moderate-leaning citizens in a bid to convert them. The relative success of these efforts is implicit in the fact that locals leaving to fight in Syria are overwhelmingly opting to align themselves with ISIS or JN rather than the ostensibly more secular brigades of the FSA.³¹³ Furthermore, some of those that have initially joined the FSA have defected to JN or ISIS.³¹⁴

Respondents believed that this was because it is considered more honorable to fight for a religious cause – as advocated by JN and ISIS - than a national or political goal. Relatively low levels of support – considering the organization's reputation as a moderate and legitimate revolutionary force - for the FSA were also discernible in quantitative findings. For example, only 19 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that there is strong or some support, while 64 percent reported that there is strong or some opposition to the FSA in their community (see Figure 2). It is noteworthy however, that a considerable 13 percent of Irbid GQ respondents were neutral in their stance toward the FSA (see Figure 2). Though the violent religious influences discussed here may be strong and largely uncontested within Irbid, quantitative findings overwhelmingly suggest that they have yet to influence mainstream society: 92 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while four percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Islam does not allow the killing of other people (see Figure 40). A



³¹¹ The New Arab 2015. 'Controversial Saudi preacher splits opinions during Jordan visit', The New Arab July 08, 2015.

³¹² "Of course, the one who joins these groups doesn't do so before getting closer to God and becoming religious. I mean, not anyone joins these groups. And they don't accept people unless they see that they are religious. The main aspect that they have is religiosity." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

³¹³ Waters, Gregory 2016. 'The fluidity of identity among Jordanian foreign fighters in Syria', Open Democracy, July 22, 2016.

³¹⁴ "He left at the start to join the Free Syrian Army. Then he found himself training with Al Nusra, and then suddenly at the end he is an ISIS member, or his tendency is toward ISIS." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

rejection of violent Islam was also evident in several respondents' emphasis on their religion's merciful qualities.³¹⁵

"In the beginning, Salafists were stirring people up toward extremism, but their goal wasn't to destroy the country. They were preaching for religion, or doing private things, meaning that their goal wasn't terrorism but a call for religion. As for the Al Nusra Front, when they first appeared they said that they were a religious group who fought the Syrian regime."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

With Salafist Jihadists drowning out moderate voices, religious deficiency is vulnerable to extremist manipulation.

Though there exist competing religious ideologies in Irbid, Salafist Jihadists are the most active in their campaign to attract followers. Among those who are most receptive to the noisy proselytizing of religious extremists are those with weak religious foundations or with no religious grounding at all - those with little or no reference point from which to gauge the extremity of the messages that they encounter.³¹⁶ These individuals lack the capacity to scrutinize the relative credibility of Islamic interpretations advanced by VEOs, and are thus more likely to accept them.³¹⁷ While the link between religious deficiency and VEO sympathies is not a categorical one,³¹⁸ respondents did appreciate its actuality with respect to the MB, in which the majority identified a less extreme religious environment with the potential to safeguard against Salafist Jihadism.³¹⁹ (For further discussion of the MB's potential as a barrier to VEOs, see section 2.2 Support for Political and non-Violent Islamist Groups.) The relationship between religious ignorance and vulnerability to radicalization is particularly applicable to individuals facing challenging socio-economic circumstances and searching for relief and/or stability.³²⁰ Local Salafist Jihadist activists are exploiting

³¹⁵ "Any person or group who attacks humans is a terrorist to me. Islam is a religion of mercy and forgiveness." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

³¹⁶ "The Islamic organizations that are in Jordan play a hand in extremism because most of the Jordanian youths do not have very much knowledge about Islamic culture; their knowledge base is weak. So these groups are able to get ideas into their heads, which they claim are Islamic principles, and the youth think that if they do not follow what they say then they will go to hell. This is because they have no Islamic education, at least not enough." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³¹⁷ "Religion has been explained to them [extremists] in the wrong way. They [extremists] don't understand religion, but they blindly apply it. There are verses in the Quran that have a different interpretation, and it says things differently. Generally, there is a difference between the verse and its real interpretation. They [extremists] don't understand interpretation, and just apply what they have been ordered with; it's like brainwashing." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

³¹⁸ "The guy whom I know studied Islamic Sharia and works in a mosque...and he was still recruited." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³¹⁹ "It's harder to recruit a guy who is with the Muslim Brotherhood to Al Nusra because they have their own agenda. As for someone who is not with a group, it's easier to manipulate him." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

³²⁰ "[He] was affected by religion because he was naïve and knew nothing about religion, and these thoughts affected him. Also, his financial situation was bad." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

such vulnerability by attempting to convince the disenfranchised that their circumstances will improve upon embracing an extreme religious ideology.

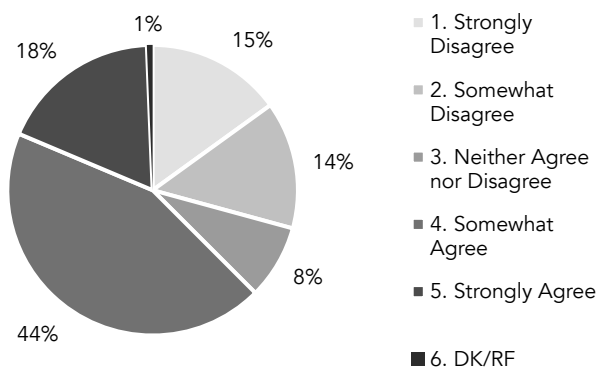
"He was away from religion and he came to befriend a religious group. They tried to convince him with their thoughts and change his mind by telling him that his situation will get better and that God will forgive him. They fed him radical thoughts, but he doesn't know any better and he thinks that what they say is right."

(Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

There are concerns that religious discourse is being increasingly politicized, potentially repelling locals from religious engagement.

Having observed the dangers of religious ignorance, respondents emphasized the importance of nurturing a moderate but robust Islamic foundation among local youths, including from within the family environment. In doing so, one respondent urged, a priority should be to disentangle politics from religion – two phenomena that some argue have become dangerously intertwined since the beginning of the Syrian conflict.³²¹ Furthermore, there are calls for greater community engagement by more moderate religious leaders, whom respondents considered potentially instrumental in strengthening resilience against Salafist Jihadist messaging. Consequently, they bemoaned the paucity of moderate imams in Irbid, and the lack of public opposition to VE from those who do practice locally.³²² Meanwhile, there are general concerns that local traditional religious practices are being co-opted by political interests, and that local sheikhs are conflating religion with politics.³²³ This concern was voiced with specific reference to the growing presence of Syrian refugees and the advancement of their political agendas within the community. Similarly, one respondent decried the qualitative deterioration of Islamic education at local Islamic centers; noticeably at those centers operated by Syrian women, religious discourse has reportedly been supplanted by anti-Syrian regime

Figure 41. To what extent do you think that religion and politics should be kept separate?



³²¹ "We need to raise awareness among Jordanian mothers, and also awareness within schools, to clarify the difference between politics and religion - not to politicize religion." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³²² "Imams: they have to carry the bigger responsibility to raise the awareness of the youth and children, and to explain to them that the Islamic religion is not about being strict, killing and burning corpses. There is a shortage from them, and we have to blame ourselves too." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

³²³ "Sheikhs who do not separate between religion and politics can cause problems, whereas those which are educated and have studied Sharia correctly can separate between religion and politics." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

agendas since 2011.³²⁴ The same respondent explained that they are now reluctant to send their child to Qur'anic lessons for fear that they may encounter manipulative political influences.³²⁵ The politicization of religious practices is potentially repelling locals from religious engagement, which, considering the findings presented in the paragraph above, may leave youth vulnerable to VE influences. Testament to locals' aversion against political Islam is a preference for apolitical sermons. Indeed, the most popular sermons among Irbid's youth are reportedly those offering guidance about how to behave during Ramadan, and how to interact responsibly with family, friends and neighbors. Attitudes commensurate with concerns about the relationship between religion and politics were evident in quantitative findings: 62 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 29 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that religion and politics should be kept separate (see Figure 41). Accordingly, there were calls for local imams to be encouraged and trained in how to preach apolitical Islam, and for school curricula to clearly distinguish between the two disciplines.

"We need to raise the consciousness of our imams about how to interpret the Qur'an and explain it to people far from politics. We could have a lesson every week in our schools about this topic, and place this in our existing curriculums."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

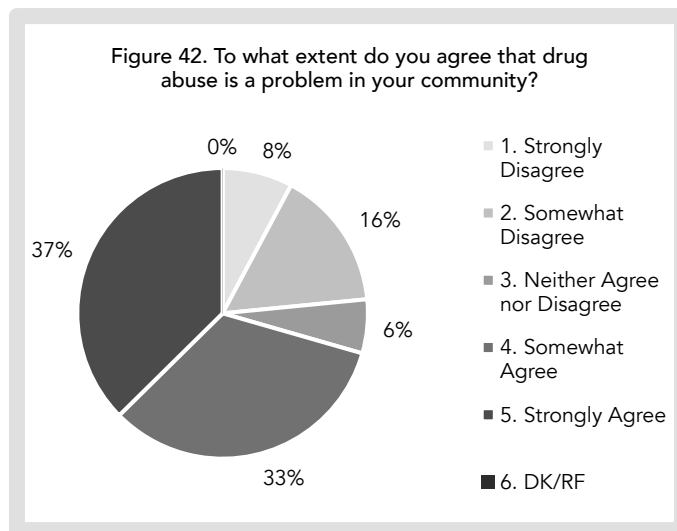
³²⁴ "In previous times, even the Syrian women who were living in Jordan would teach religion, and some of them were very educated. But after the revolution began and many Syrians entered Jordan, the goal of these centers became to repel people from the Syrian regime of Bashar [Al Assad], and not actually [teaching] religion." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³²⁵ "I am now scared to send my son to Qur'an lessons because they began to mix religion with politics...For me I find that the people from Dara'a founded many of these [Islamic] centers, and their objective is 100 percent not religion, but to serve their own political interests." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

4.3 EXPOSURE TO CRIME AND CONFLICT

Drug abuse is identified as a leading social issue, and there is a perceived relationship between drug culture and VE.

With specific reference to ISIS supporters in the area, several respondents noted that minor drug use forms part of VEO-related micro-cultures. Indeed, it was to such a culture that some of the targets of the March 2016 Irbid raid allegedly belonged.³²⁶ One explanation for the relationship between drug abuse and VEOs is that VEOs are actively targeting drug users as potential recruits.³²⁷ In doing so, recruiters are purportedly using pills manufactured by VEOs themselves as lure.³²⁸ These pills are most likely to be the amphetamine Captagon, which is known to be widespread across Jordan and Syria, where the drug is also being manufactured.³²⁹



Numerous drugs raids within Irbid substantiate this assumption.³³⁰ Another explanation for the relationship between drug abuse and VEOs is that VEOs are encouraging drug dependency in prospective recruits in order to secure their loyalty through drugs provision.³³¹ The correlation between drug culture and VE tallies with claims that VEOs – including JN and ISIS – consist of former or current drugs traffickers.³³² The cell targeted by the March 2016 Irbid raid for instance, is thought to have had links with the drugs trade.³³³ Aside from these empirical observations, respondents recognized a psychological link between delinquency and VE. According to some respondents, for those who have engaged in degenerative lifestyles such as theft and drug abuse, the promise of Islamic salvation –

³²⁶ "There were guys who smoked weed and took drugs when the Irbid operation was caught, and many of the people who use drugs are supporters of ISIS." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

³²⁷ "People who use drugs also join because they have nothing to do and no power. These groups [VEOs] know how to attract them and give them jobs." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

³²⁸ "They also try to lure young men by using drugs and have even reached the point where they make their own drug capsules in Jordan without the need to import them from abroad." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³²⁹ Drahl, Carmen 2015. 'What you need to know about Captagon, the drug of choice in war-torn Syria', Forbes, November 21, 2015.

³³⁰ Hussein, Rana 2014. 'Over 1 million Captagon pills seized this month', The Jordan Times, November 19, 2014.

³³¹ "They [VEOs] also use drugs to lure youth and brainwash them by making them dependent on drugs." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³³² "The members of these groups and Al Nusra are drugs traffickers and former criminals. They decided to destroy Syria." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³³³ Black, Ian 2016. 'Terrorist attacks and security lapses fuel fears for Jordan's stability', The Guardian, July 25, 2016.

including via jihad - as typically advertised by regional VEOs, is very attractive.³³⁴ This is particularly concerning for Irbid, which has gained a reputation for drugs trafficking and consumption, manifest in frequent drugs raids within the governorate.³³⁵ The districts of Koorah and Taybeh have proven to be especially prone to drugs circulation,³³⁶ as has Irbid City street Market, where street vendors themselves are suspected of engaging with drugs.³³⁷ Al A'rous street in the Tukman neighborhood is also singled out as an area associated with drug abuse. However, concerns about drug abuse prevail throughout the governorate, with an overwhelming 70 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreeing, while 24 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that drug abuse is a problem in their community (see Figure 42).

"Then comes a point of remorse of what he did in his life, and he becomes in need of purification - purification of consciousness from what he deems deeds that angered God like free sexual relationships and drinking and partying and so on. I believe that the idea of purification from sins is a dangerous and neglected idea in all the literature about why extremism appears. Most of them go on a spree with their personal lives...Then a moment of remorse comes because they get affected by a video clip or a YouTube video or through someone they meet."

(Male, 50, Journalist, Amman – on Irbid governorate)

There have been a number of recent incidents of street crime linked either to VE or inter-tribal disputes, but most respondents have not been directly affected.

According to several respondents, the increase in Irbid's VE is discernible in acts of street violence within their communities, which they associate with VEO influences. For instance, VEO supporters have reportedly demonstrated a propensity for physical gang-violence against local residents on a number of occasions. One such incident occurred in 2014, when a group of JN supporters assaulted an 18-year old youth – the son of an MP – in the Irbid Professional Association Complex located behind the south gate of Yarmouk University. The assailants were subsequently arrested. Concerns about violent crime also relate to the profusion of weapons across Irbid, namely in Taybeh district and Al Barha village. For example, violent confrontations between tribes – namely the Al Awneh tribe, the Qur'an tribe and the Bani Kinanah tribe - involving knives and guns are not uncommon in Taybeh district. Often during such occasions, it is deemed too dangerous even for the police to intervene. Though the perpetrators are often arrested eventually, as happened in August 2016 after a fight between the Qur'an tribe and the Al Awneh tribe in which an individual fired a gun, injuring three people. Neither is intra-tribal violence

³³⁴ "This troublemaker who went with Al Nusra went suddenly and I didn't notice any changes in him. I think what made him go is religion. At one point maybe, he saw that he made a lot of sins and thought the best way is to go for jihad. He used to steal and use drugs before that. " (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

³³⁵ Hussein, Rana 2015. '12 suspected drug dealers arrested in Irbid, Badia raids', The Jordan Times, December 10, 2015; Al Ghad 2016. 'Ramtha: 120 dogs found guarding drug 4 dealers: 3 thousand bags of narcotics confiscated', Al Ghad, May 31, 2016; The Jordan Times 2016. 'Six suspected drug dealers arrested', The Jordan Times, July 04, 2016.

³³⁶ Petra 2015. '280 drug cases registered in west Irbid in 8 months', The Jordan Times, April 28, 2015.

³³⁷ "The street market is in the center of the city, in a folk area where drugs are possibly widespread. Most of those that work in the street market are uneducated, uncultured and unemployed youths." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

unheard of in Taybeh. For example, in January 2012 a member of the Qur'an tribe stabbed a fellow tribesman – Ali Mohammad Awad Qur'an – to death. Intra-tribal conflicts in Al Barha have also escalated to dangerous proportions in the past. For example in October 2013, following the murder of the MP Abd Al Nasser Bani Hani, during a fight with members of the same tribe (the Bani Hani tribe) a number of unidentified individuals set fire to two houses and Al Barha Brick Factory. The northern quarter of Irbid City, or Hayy Shamali, has also shown signs of violent conflict involving lethal weapons. The Al Jamra and Al Hamaydeh tribal families in particular are associated with such violence. The latter for instance, has been engaged in numerous confrontations within the Northern Bus Complex, where in December 2011, youth from Al Hamaydeh used sticks, knives and guns against members of the Obaidat tribe. Consequently, tens of people were injured. Likewise, in May 2013, four people were hospitalized after a violent encounter between the Al Hamaydeh and the Al Hayja' tribes in the Northern Complex area. Ramtha is another area associated with weapons circulation, and has witnessed violent gun-crime as a consequence. In June 2014 for instance, one local was shot and four others injured during an intra-tribal shootout involving machine guns, pistols and pump-action rifles.³³⁸ Though respondents did not discuss incidents of violence here, there are rumors that this district accommodates a major black market for weapons trading. Though especially acute in Taybeh and Al Barha, the circulation of weapons was a general concern among respondents across the governorate. For example, 51 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 44 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the availability of weapons is a problem in their community (see Figure 43). A large proportion of locals also identify crime in general as excessive within their locality: 44 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 50 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that crime is a problem in their community (see Figure 44). But despite an intensified awareness of local crime, the majority of locals have not felt particularly endangered by it: only 20 percent of Irbid GQ respondents agreed, while 80 percent disagreed that they or their family had suffered directly from crime (see Figure 45).

"He was at a gathering about Saddam Hussein, and they were discussing how they were against the revolution in Syria. This group [JN supporters of Jordanian and Syrian origin] was there by chance and heard what they were saying. So they violated the young man and beat him. He was in the hospital for one month because he was really hurt."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³³⁸ Hussein, Rana 2014. 'Man killed in Ramtha shoot-out', The Jordan Times, June 28, 2014.

Figure 43. To what extent do you agree that the availability of weapons is a problem in your community?

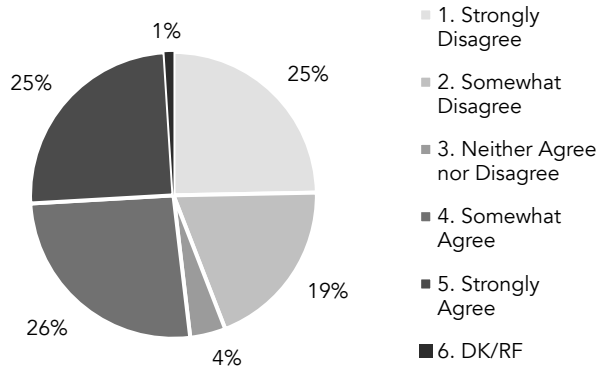


Figure 44. To what extent do you agree that crime is a problem in your community?

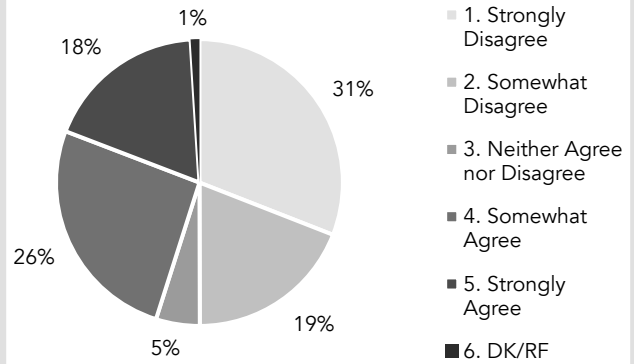
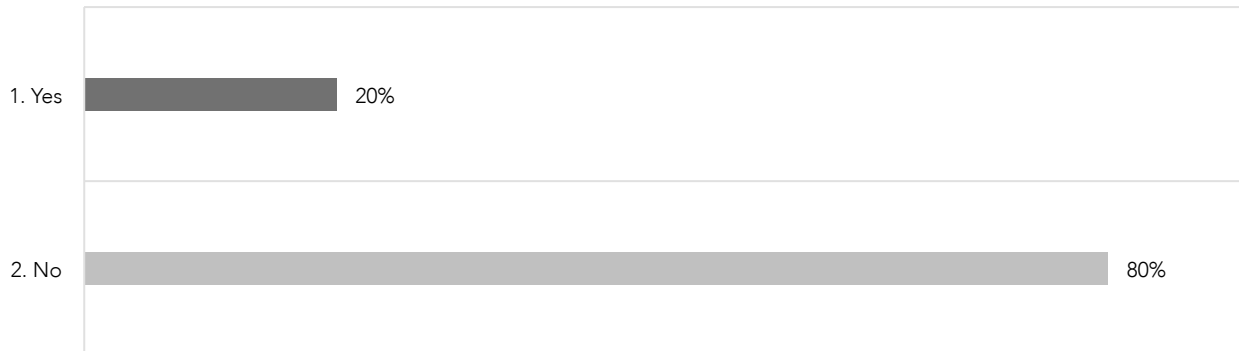


Figure 45. Have you or your family directly suffered from crime?



4.4 EXPOSURE TO VE AND PERCEPTIONS OF VEO THREAT

Support for VEOs in Irbid is largely attributed by respondents to the conflict in neighboring Syria.

As the Syrian conflict saw the emergence and expansion of several VEOs, respondents recognized a number of routes through which the conflict has generated local support for these groups. First, as local living standards deteriorated after imports from Syria dwindled and refugees mass-migrated into the area,³³⁹ many locals have become increasingly disaffected with their current socio-economic circumstances and thus receptive to alternatives offered by VEOs (see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt). Second, local antipathy toward the Syrian regime has generated admiration for the groups who are fighting Assad's forces.³⁴⁰ For example, one respondent admitted that though he generally objects to ISIS, he approves of the organization's activities against the Syrian regime.³⁴¹ Likewise, JN's effective opposition to the Syrian regime may explain the group's marginal standing as the most popular of the VEOs active in Syria among locals in Irbid. It is telling that many regard JN as the most determined and legitimate anti-Assad organization in the region (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs). Meanwhile, an influx of Syrian refugees has substantiated feelings – sometimes religious – of obligation to contribute to the resistance of Syrian Sunnis facing persecution at the hands of the Assad regime, which certain locals identify as a criminal entity.³⁴² As is widely known, regional VEOs exploit the narrative of Sunni victimization to lend credence to their agenda.³⁴³ Thus the overflow of the Syrian conflict into Irbid is playing into the local Salafist Jihadist "terrorism-justifying ideology".³⁴⁴ In other words, the local presence of Syrian Sunni victims is generating a sense of duty among residents, which is harnessed by VEOs seeking to bolster their ranks. It is noteworthy that duty-bound Sunnis are equally, if not more, concerned with supporting their "brothers" in Palestine as they are with defending Syrian civilians. However, because Syria has been more accessible, it has been a more popular option for foreign fighters.³⁴⁵ This point has been addressed by prominent local Salafist Jihadists such as Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi, who announced in 2012 that, were there an accessible route to Israel, a jihad against Jews would be prioritized

³³⁹ As of May 2016, 30 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan's urban areas have been placed in Irbid (UNHCR, 2016. 'UNHCR Factsheet, Field Office Irbid, Jordan' May 2016). A January 2016 government census recorded the total number of Syrian refugees in Irbid as 207,903 (Ghazal, Mohammad 2016. 'Population stands at around 9.5 million, including 2.9 million guests', The Jordan Times, January 30, 2016).

³⁴⁰ "I also blame Bashar [Al Assad] for the increased level of terrorism in Jordan because he is killing everyone, which makes Jordan radical somewhat and people hate him and want to kill him." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁴¹ "My advantage now is to support Daesh because they are fighting the Syrian regime." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

³⁴² "Sunnis feel they have to fight for their people and [that] if they don't they will go to hell. The second reason [why locals are joining VEOs] is that they see Assad as a criminal, and this is why people go to Syria." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

³⁴³ International Crisis Group 2016. 'Exploiting disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State', ICG, March 14, 2016.

³⁴⁴ Kruglanski et al. 2014. 'The Psychology of radicalization and deradicalization: how significance quest impacts violent extremism', *Advances in Political Psychology* 35 (1): 70-93.

³⁴⁵ "He said literally, that if there were a way to go to Gaza he wouldn't have gone to Syria." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

ahead of the Syrian cause.³⁴⁶ Finally, as discussed in the following paragraph, another way in which the Syrian conflict has impacted local support for VEOs is that since the conflict in Syria escalated, the growing influx of refugees entering Irbid potentially amplified the danger of extremist influences penetrating the locality. Consequently, the threat is seen to have expanded from one of infrequent isolated terrorist incidents to a nationwide security hazard. More generally, such is the geographical proximity of Irbid to Syria that the conflict is difficult to ignore. One respondent reflected this, explaining that in certain local areas - notably in Ramtha, Hanina and certain refugee camps – explosions from Syria can often be heard.³⁴⁷ More significantly, there have been several incidents of stray airstrikes from Syria falling on Ramtha,³⁴⁸ even killing and injuring locals on one occasion.³⁴⁹

"It used to be individual actions but these things [terrorist attacks] increased after Syria and Iraq, especially in Irbid because it's a border city and surrounded by battles on all sides. And because a lot of refugees entered it, and there might be terrorists among those refugees; children could be in sleeper cells until they grow up. They tried everything to enter Irbid, even through carrier pigeons...In addition to the hardships of living in Jordan, this could provide them [VEOs] with the best atmosphere to enter Jordan and recruit people due to the poverty and unemployment. That's why they are focusing on Irbid."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

Locals associate an increase in VE following the start of the Syrian conflict with the concurrent influx of Syrian refugees.

The majority of respondents accepted that Salafist Jihadism existed in their locality before the Syrian war erupted. However, they claimed that one of the main reasons for the increase in VE is the influence of "radical" or "extremist" refugees. Indeed, for several respondents, the cultural and religious ideologies of many Syrians are incommensurate with their own local, less extreme interpretations, and are consequently having a radicalizing effect on their communities.³⁵⁰ One reflection of Syrians' religious infiltration into Irbid is the increasing number of Qur'anic memorization gatherings according to one

³⁴⁶ The Middle East Media Research Institute 2012. 'Jordanian Salafi-Jihadi Abu Muhammad Al-Tahawi: 'We will enter Palestine from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria' to wage Jihad and liberate it', MEMRI, October 25, 2012.

³⁴⁷ "When we used to go to the King Abdullah hospital we used to hear the explosions in Syria. And in South Irbid they sometimes get affected by the explosions - also in Ramtha and especially in Hanina and camp areas." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

³⁴⁸ Albawaba News 2016. 'Cross-border shelling from Syria forces some Jordanian residents to flee', Albawaba News, February 15, 2016.

³⁴⁹ Albawaba News 2015. 'Shelling from Syria kills one, injures four others in North Jordan', Albawaba News, June 25, 2015.

³⁵⁰ "When a high number of refugees entered Jordan from a different environment with new ideas, it is normal that they will have an effect on Jordanians. Among the refugees, some are average people, but some are strict and conservative, and some of them actually belong to extremist groups in Syria. The Syrians that sought refuge in Jordan have a different culture to us; they dress differently, they are conservative, and they are strict with ideas such as that a woman cannot go out or work." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

respondent, who associated these meetings with VE.³⁵¹ At least some of these gatherings are administered by formally established local organizations, such as the Al Binan Association for Social Development, which caters especially for women.³⁵² Another indication that Syrian refugees are affecting the local religious climate is that some of them – notably from Dara’a – have become preachers and established Islamic schools within the locality, several of which are also known to provide Qur’anic memorization classes for children. Moreover, there was reportedly a case in early 2015 of a Qur’anic memorization center (located on Tal Atin street beside Al Dura Store) hosting disturbing ritualistic gatherings run by Syrian women that allegedly encouraged confrontation with death. Deeming it inappropriate, the authorities subsequently shut this down. For some locals, these phenomena are all representative of increasing VE influences.³⁵³ A more direct accusation by a number of respondents was that VEO-affiliated refugees are actively disseminating Islamic extremism and encouraging host communities to pursue jihad in Syria.³⁵⁴ Likewise, there are fears among locals that VEO operatives are disguising themselves as refugees in order to cross the border and expand their influence and support base. This is a general concern shared by the country’s security officials.³⁵⁵ The presence of Syrian extremists has purportedly activated cells of domestic Salafist Jihadists in Irbid, galvanizing them into action.³⁵⁶ One respondent lent implicit support to this notion, arguing that the Syrian conflict is primarily responsible for the local emergence of VEOs, with the exception of AQ, which already had a Jordanian foothold.³⁵⁷

“With regard to the Salafists, it’s true that they were around and present in Jordan even before the Syrian conflict. But they were repressed, and they did not have any activities that are worth mentioning. However, when these other groups emerged, they encouraged them indirectly to increase their activities...Of course, there are some strict religious refugees because they come from a very strict and conservative society in terms of religion and traditions and customs. And surely

³⁵¹ “With regard to violent extremism in Jordan, it is not very noticeable. However, with the entry of Syrian refugees to Jordan, Qur’anic memorization circles have increased” (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁵² Henry Luce Foundation 2015. ‘Local faith community and related civil society engagement in humanitarian response with Syrian refugees in Irbid, Jordan’, Henry Luce Foundation, April 2015.

³⁵³ “I am also shocked by the people of Dara’a that have now become preachers even though they were not like this in Dara’a. They have founded Islamic schools in Irbid, one of which is across from my house, and their objective is not religion, but to target small children - to plant seeds in their young minds. There is an organization in Irbid where the women placed another woman in a coffin and told her to cover herself and feel death. This is backwardness not religion.” (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁵⁴ “Some of the Syrians who managed to enter Jordan are extremists, or belonged to one of the groups fighting in Syria. They might drag or attract people in Jordan to join them: they convince them through religion, through the close relationship between Jordanians and Syrians, and the fact that they are all Arabs and Muslims who have to unite to get rid of Bashar Al Assad.” (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁵⁵ The Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2016. ‘Interview with His Majesty King Abdullah II with BBC’s Lyse Duet’, February 02, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/news/interview-his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-bbc-s-lyse-doucet>>

³⁵⁶ Jordan Correspondent 2016. ‘Has IS established foothold in Jordan?’, Al Monitor, March 09, 2016.

³⁵⁷ “All these extremist groups that have emerged had no presence before the Syrian conflict, except for Al Qa’ida.” (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

some of them already belonged to extremist groups in Syria before entering Jordan as refugees."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

Some respondents argue that Syrian refugee camps in the governorate are home to VEO recruiters.

Some respondents were more categorical in associating a rise in VE with the presence of refugees, claiming that there was a complete absence of local VE until Syrians began entering their communities.³⁵⁸ This perception has even spawned a conspiracy theory – that Syrians, intent on causing destruction, have long sought to sow extremism into Jordan's communities. Accordingly, there is concern among locals that VE elements among the refugees are using camps as channels through which to infiltrate the wider community.³⁵⁹ As well as spreading extremism, these individuals are believed to be actively recruiting for groups such as ISIS and JN.³⁶⁰ The same respondents were duly supportive of stricter border security checks and refugee limitations.³⁶¹ They also stressed their desire for Syrians to be confined to camps, rather than intermingling with host communities. With these points in mind, it is unsurprising that many locals are very wary of their new Syrian neighbors, refusing to interact with them for fear of negative influences.³⁶² As a consequence, some residents are withdrawing from areas of community engagement where Syrians are beginning to participate, such as charitable social clubs.³⁶³ Others are outright hostile toward them, vilifying them for their supposed self-interest and harmful intentions, and blaming them for the destruction of their own homeland.³⁶⁴ Iraqi refugees on the other hand, are exempt from the kind of

³⁵⁸ "There is no way that it [VE] was present before, and then after the refugee crisis it began to show." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁵⁹ "It is possible that among those who entered there are extremists. Many of the Syrians that entered Jordan left the Za'atari camp and other refugee camps. We used to hear about a lot of crimes occurring in these refugee camps, as well other problems that are caused by the presence of Syrians in the refugee camps, and outside the refugee camps." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁶⁰ "I have noticed that the members of Daesh and Al Nusra who are in Jordan are Syrians. They came from Syria to recruit Jordanians to fight with them, to prove to people that individuals of all nationalities support them." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁶¹ "If Jordan maintains an open policy for refugees this will lead to deterioration in the security situation in Jordan. It will allow new ideologies to enter, and it is possible that some of these refugees could be extremists." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁶² "I have six Syrian neighbors in the same building of my apartment. I don't let my children talk to them because I don't know them - I don't know how they think. But with Jordanian neighbors that I knew long ago, and know their parents and how they are raised, it's easy and natural for my children to connect with them - there is no danger in that. These groups who attract young people are mostly Syrians who entered the country with the refugee flood in Jordan. They might not be Syrians, but they say that they are." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁶³ "I used to give hand-craft workshops in a club. But when the clubs became full of Syrians, I stopped training and sending my children to these social clubs due to being fearful of extremism infiltrating my family." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁶⁴ "They are fighting Jordanians in all aspects of life. So in my opinion they are greedy. When they destroy their own country and all the bliss that they were enjoying, and they come to Jordan and want to do the same thing here, thank God there is no one listening to them or helping them do that." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

hostility directed toward Syrians. In part, as discussed below (see section 6.1 Perceived Impact of Foreign Relations), this is because the conflict in Iraq is regarded as being more self-contained, and thus not so damaging to circumstances in Jordan.³⁶⁵

"We never used to hear about these issues until the Syrian conflict began to develop. And these days, extremism is more of an issue. It began when the Syrians entered Jordan, as if they were planning for something and they built it very slowly until they got what they wanted...they want to destroy Jordan by luring Jordanians and Palestinians, so that they are not exposed, and so they are not the ones to blame. The Syrian refugee situation is the reason for this extremism we have."

(Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

Focus: An Islamic school run exclusively for Syrians is generating suspicion among locals.

"The school has newly opened across from my home. It is for Qur'anic memorization. The owner of the center is a Jordanian man, and he has a Syrian co-owner. I approached them once in order to conduct a crafts workshop but they rejected the idea of me giving any workshop, or for me to join at all because it is only for Syrians; Jordanians are not allowed in the center. They are open from eight in the morning until the evening. I don't know if they are affiliated with a particular group or if they receive support from abroad, or how they teach religion. It is the government that should monitor such centers, to know the ideas that they are spreading among the students. They even bring children on Fridays for these memorization workshops."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Some respondents associate certain behavior and characteristics with prospective violent extremists, to which they argue their families and friends should be attentive.

Several respondents detected a range of mannerisms and peculiarities that are typical of those on the path to VE and are illustrative of an increase in Salafist Jihadism within Irbid. At the psychosocial level, budding extremists tend to become increasingly introverted. Additionally, they will often abandon their former relationships (unless their friends or families themselves constitute extremist influences) and enter new social circles with like-minded Salafist Jihadists. VE tendencies are also perceptible through verbal expression. For example, some respondents identified Salafist attitudes through overheard dialogues or conversation with locals. Telling points of discussion include support for severe punishments such as stoning and hand amputation, calls for Sharia law and disapproval of behavior perceived as lavish or

³⁶⁵ "The conflict in Iraq did not affect the situation in Jordan. The Iraqi people are very aware and mature and open. Regardless of the large number of conflicts that occurred in Iraq with different countries they did not affect any country's security or economy, and it wasn't as violent as what happened in Syria - the creation of all those extremist groups that terrorized people from different religions. The Iraqi people did not drag anyone into fighting with them in the name of religion." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

decadent.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, individuals leaning toward Salafist Jihadism typically display increasing signs of verbal - and sometimes physical - aggression, as well as socio-religious intolerance.³⁶⁷ For instance, one respondent recalled witnessing a nascent JN member enforcing cultural austerity on others,³⁶⁸ and there has been a notable escalation in Shia discrimination since the Iraq war.³⁶⁹ Finally, respondents noted physical changes in local individuals veering toward Salafist Jihadism, such as clothing and facial hair.³⁷⁰ On the other hand, there are several individuals whose conversion to Salafist Jihadism and allegiance to VEOs has been so sudden that these indicators have been absent.³⁷¹

"There's a story of one of the people who is the brother of my neighbor. He changed and became someone different. He was a 26 year-old educated man and he had a college degree. He suddenly changed with his friends and became more introverted, and had no interest in sitting with people and talking to them...He became very radical in his thoughts. He befriended a group of people who looked like sheikhs, and he imitated them even in the way he looks. Those people are not from this area. This man I'm talking about was a normal guy and he used to pray and fast, but after he got to know this group he became very religious. He became very stubborn and used yelling to voice his opinions. He cursed others and he stopped talking to people who are far away from religion. He thought that everyone who is not religious is an infidel."

(Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁶⁶ "Some people are saying that execution of people is a must, and they want to cut the hands of thieves and throw stones at adulterers. I know of people here who call for religious ruling in Jordan. They are people I got introduced to recently from my work, and during our break time they talk about these topics. Also when a party takes place here, those people say it's wrong and it should be stopped because we are in a Muslim country where this is forbidden. I remember a certain party that took place in the Dead Sea - like a pool party - and many people objected, saying that we are an Islamic country and this is not right." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

³⁶⁷ "He would be opposed to anyone listening to music, and would talk to them saying that music is shameful and not in line with religion. And even though he did not use a violent approach, his tone of voice was always stern and loud. If someone were to overhear him, they would think there was a problem or that he was in a fight with those whose behavior he opposes." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁶⁸ "He became stricter, meaning that if he saw a guy raising his hair in a style he would consider it forbidden. Or if he saw pictures of guys on shop-windows he would destroy them with sticks and knives...more than once he broke televisions. When the guys were watching football matches, he would come and say that this is forbidden." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

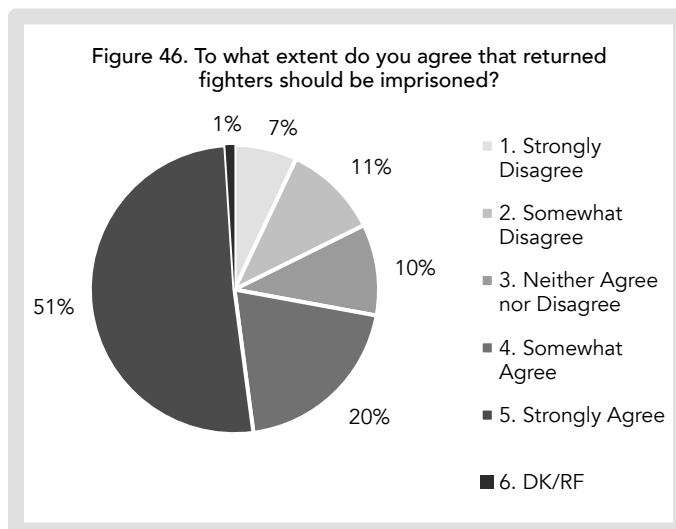
³⁶⁹ "People started seeing Shiites as infidels. I have a friend who is a Shiite and faced awful situations because of her sect; they called her an infidel. This all started because of the Iraq war; before that we had no religious conflicts or racism." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

³⁷⁰ "I think that a certain group convinced him to join them for jihad in the name of God, and he started wearing clothes like them and grew a beard, though he used to dress normally before." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁷¹ "He wasn't affiliated with anyone. He used to smoke Shisha a lot and he used to curse a lot as well. I didn't even notice any changes in him lately. Last time I saw him was last Ramadan. He was very normal." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

There is a degree of respect for local foreign fighters who have died in action, but most are socially rejected.

As noted elsewhere (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives and section 4.3 Human Rights and Civil Liberties), local communities have staged a number of events in commemoration of residents who have been “martyred” in Syria. Thus, there is a perceptible degree of admiration for those who leave to fight and die in Syria. However, any such veneration has eroded over time. Until 2013, people who went to fight in Syria were widely considered martyrs among locals and were treated as such. However, since the conflict progressed, and JN and ISIS emerged as distinct organizations with more self-serving ambitions than combatting the Syrian regime, people stopped explicitly celebrating the “martyrdom” of youth who had fought with such groups. As well as growing disenchantment with the motivations of these organizations, these reservations were largely for fear of government surveillance. Furthermore, respect for locals killed in Syria is not universal, and it is notably absent among those who disassociate combat in Syria from “true jihad”.³⁷² In one case, the family of a local who died fighting with a VEO in Syria expressed shame in their association with the individual, refusing to publicly mourn his death.³⁷³ Many respondents asserted that this attitude of shame is typical of local families that have relatives fighting in Syria.³⁷⁴ Expression of such attitudes may be measures taken by the family to help them escape the social stigmatization sometimes directed toward relatives of local VEO members.³⁷⁵ However, there is a possibility that such attitudes are adopted in order to evade scrutiny by a vigilant security apparatus (see section 4.2 Law Enforcement). Meanwhile, those foreign fighters who return to their communities in Irbid are not afforded the same reverence as some of those who have died. In fact, the majority of locals regard returning fighters as criminals who should be punished.³⁷⁶ According to quantitative findings, 71 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 18 percent disagreed that returned fighters should be imprisoned (see Figure 46).



³⁷² “So society has a negative perspective of those that go to Syria and join these terrorist groups because they are not killing Jews but Muslims, and this is not real jihad.” (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁷³ “His family was shocked because of what he did and they did not feel sorry for him – even they were against him. Though he died they refused to [establish] a mourning house for him.” (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁷⁴ “The families of youths that go [to Syria], they are always trying to cover up what their children have done because they are ashamed; it is not something to be proud of.” (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁷⁵ “Anyone who goes to Syria and returns or dies there - his family gets marginalized by society; no one talks to them because they become afraid of them.” (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁷⁶ “He was wrong when he went to Syria and he should be arrested for it...He should’ve been prosecuted and arrested for a long time so other people would learn.” (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

"They call him [someone who has fought abroad] a martyr and [say that] he died in the name of God because he went and fought the Shiites and they are enemies like the Israelis in their opinion. [There are] many cases are like this."

(Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

5.0 EXTERNAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

5.1 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Syrian conflict is widely judged to have caused an increase in VE and VEO support in Irbid, far greater than that from the ongoing instability in Iraq following the 2003 US-led invasion.

It is evident that the Syrian conflict was perceived by most respondents to have had a significantly greater radicalizing impact locally than has the Iraq turmoil since 2003, largely due to the difference in refugee numbers. But other factors are also relevant here. One respondent for instance, attributes Syria's exceptional influence on local VE to the closer affiliation and thus interaction that locals have with Syrians - especially between the populations of Ramtha and Dara'a (see section 5.2 Religious Values, Attitudes and Beliefs) - than with Iraqis, and the stronger magnetism of the Syrian cause compared to that of Iraq.³⁷⁷ The latter claim is based on the peculiar nature of the Syrian conflict. For instance, more so than the Iraq war, the dynamics of the Syrian context center on the notion of a victimized population's legitimate resistance against a clearly identified oppressor, hence the conflict's revolutionary dimension. Furthermore, the media has consistently promoted this dynamic, thus reinforcing its currency. Meanwhile, the Syrian conflict has been characterized by the international community's inertia and indecision in confronting Assad,³⁷⁸ thereby strengthening the sense of obligation among regional populations. This is likely to be especially true of those living in close geographical proximity to the conflict, who are most exposed to the conflict and best positioned to act. Thus, Irbid - and particularly Ramtha - are noteworthy in this respect. Similarly, due its specific location, Irbid represents a major access point to Jordan's 365-kilometer border with Syria. This may further explain why VE has spilled over to a greater extent from Syria than it has from the 180-kilometer Iraqi border on the other side of the country to Irbid. An additional reason why international disengagement from the Syrian conflict is significant in accounting for the rise in local VE is that it has provided a discursive and physical vacuum to be exploited by VEOs. This is manifest in the wealth of media coverage that VEOs appear to be benefitting from (see section 7.2 The Role of the Media). These observations were supported by local opinions with regard to how Syria has affected communities within Irbid: 67 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Syria has a very or somewhat negative, while 18 percent reported that it has a very or somewhat positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). That the Syrian conflict has had a greater impact on VE than post-2003 Iraq may also be partially explained by the fact that leading Islamic scholars within Jordan - such as Al Maqdisi - condemned much of the Sunni insurgency (such as that led by Al Zarqawi) during the Iraq war for its targeting of fellow Muslims,³⁷⁹ thus discouraging local support. On the other hand, there has been unanimous endorsement among Jordanian Islamist figureheads for some form of intervention with one group or another in Syria.

³⁷⁷ "People felt sympathy for Syrians more than Iraqis because only the US was fighting in Iraq. But in Syria there are many groups that are fighting and some are not Muslim, so people feel sympathy. Also many people have relatives there and Jordanians used to go to Syria a lot" (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁷⁸ Spiegel Online 2016. 'The war of Western failures: hopes for Syria fall with Aleppo', Spiegel Online, February 17, 2016.

³⁷⁹ Weiss, Michael & Hassan Hassan 2015. ISIS: Inside the army of terror. New York: Regan Arts, 2015.

"With regard to Iraq, we have not felt really felt any impact on Jordan. What really had an impact on Jordan is the Syrian conflict. It has had the largest impact on Jordan. Extremist groups such as Daesh began to arise, as well as Salafists and others. And this is because of the number of Syrians that entered Jordan, which is higher than the number of Iraqis. Also, our border with Syria is closer than Iraq, and there is not an area in Jordan which the Syrians have not reached."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

Where Assad's counter-terrorism narrative finds legitimacy, there exist elements of support for the Syrian regime and contempt for Syrian revolutionaries.

Some residents were bluntly dismissive of the Syrian victimization narrative exploited by jihadists. Several respondents for example, were entirely unsympathetic toward the Syrian revolutionary cause. Placing the blame for the Syrian conflict and rise of regional VEOs equally if not squarely on Syrian civilians, these respondents expressed support for the Syrian regime and accepted its claims of legitimate counter-insurgency.³⁸⁰ Indeed, contrary to mainstream media reports, one respondent refused to accept that the regime has been complicit in unjustified violations against civilians.³⁸¹ Furthermore, several respondents were convinced that socio-economic conditions under the Assad regime had been excellent, and provided no justification for revolt.³⁸² By extension, these respondents blamed Syrian civilians for the rise in regional VE, relieving Assad of much culpability. Further support for President Assad was implicit in claims that his regime is preferable if the only other alternative for Syria is VEO dominion.³⁸³ With large numbers of (anti-Assad) Syrians now living alongside Jordanians who entertain these views, socio-political tensions between them are intensifying and community divisions are emerging.³⁸⁴ According to one respondent, this friction has intensified to the point of death threats between Syrians - specifically those

³⁸⁰ "As for the Syrian regime, I do support it. I do not think that the Syrian system is false; it is defending its country and land. I think that Syrians are mistaken. Before, they were living in a very good and stable financial situation, and now they all regret this revolution. They destroyed their country and things will never be the same." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁸¹ "[The Syrian Army] would never rape girls as they claim. My family lives in Damascus and the army goes there, and when they don't find anything against the regime, they do not harm any individual." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁸² "I don't blame Bashar [Al Assad] because the situation in Syria was very good: electricity was free and so was education and health. They were living sustainably - they did not import any vegetables or other food items; everything was locally produced - and even though there was political repression in Syria, there were many positive things...the people were provided with everything they needed. There was no reason for them to destroy their country." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁸³ "They [Syrian people] did not begin a revolution in order to give one of these groups the power, or for these groups to govern Syria. And it's possible that Jordan will be at war with Syria if they gain power because Jordan is fighting them. So it is better for Bashar to stay in power than for any of these groups to gain power." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁸⁴ "I stopped training [giving hand-craft workshops] because after the Syrian women entered, my training was no longer desired. My thoughts differed a lot from the Syrian refugees: they consider me to be a thug who supports the regime, so they began to tell me very publically that they do not want me to train them." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

hailing from revolutionary bastions such as neighboring Dara'a - and Jordanians.³⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that respondents' viewpoints on the Syrian regime and the revolution may at least in part be influenced by personal motivations. For example, one of pro-regime respondents revealed that she had family ties to the Syrian Army.³⁸⁶ These pro-Assad verdicts conflict somewhat with other assertions among locals, such as the idea that the Assad regime itself is responsible for the rise of certain regional VEOs.³⁸⁷ One respondent for instance, speculated that Assad has permitted the passage of JN and ISIS into Syria, and that rather than targeting these groups, he is focused on attacking civilians.³⁸⁸

"According to what I hear from Syrians and Jordanians, the people in Syria are the ones who destroyed their country and supported these terrorist extremist groups. And what the government did was react to the people's actions. The government was defending itself and its land against these groups created by the people. Sabotage and destruction can happen in all countries, and the people are to blame - people who are seduced by money and positions - not the governments. The Syrian people are to blame for extremism inside their country and outside. They are the ones who allowed external intervention to happen by cooperating with people from outside Syria. The regime only defended and fought these extremists who call with the name of Islam."

(Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

The majority of respondents in Irbid is strongly hostile toward Israel and believes it has a negative effect on Jordan.

The significant unpopularity of Israel is implicit in the high levels of local support for Hamas (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs) and the belief that jihad in Israel is justifiable (see section 7.3 The Role of Violent Extremist Narratives).³⁸⁹ Indeed, for many, Israel embodies their primary enemy,³⁹⁰ and several respondents condemned Jewish complicity in the expansion of VEOs into Syria and Jordan.³⁹¹ Some of these criticisms are founded on conspiracy theories that have been promoted at public events. For example, one respondent implied that VEO foreign fighters have been indoctrinated by Jewish Rabbis disguised as Muslims, intent of tarnishing the image of Islam and the Arab world. Correspondingly, 74 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Israel has a very or somewhat negative, while only five percent reported that it has a very or somewhat positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). Meanwhile, a considerable 16 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Israel has no impact on Jordan (see

³⁸⁵ "The majority of those that came to Jordan are from Dara'a - the ones that are responsible for the revolution in Syria...I am one of the people that was threatened, that if Bashar [Al Assad] is ousted they will kill my family in Damascus." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁸⁶ "I have had two people from my family killed in Syria because they were with the Syrian Army as soldiers" (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁸⁷ "I think Daesh is a product of the Syrian regime, especially after the revolution, when people began to defect from the army and began joining Daesh and Al Nusra." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁸⁸ "[Assad] allowed Al Nusra and ISIS to come to his country and kill people. But I don't think that he is fighting these groups; he is killing what is left of his people." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

³⁸⁹ "I like the idea of resistance against the Zionist enemy." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

³⁹⁰ "Our main enemy is the Zionists." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

³⁹¹ "Jews allowed these groups [VEOs] to get into Jordan and Syria." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

Figure 55). Accordingly, a sizeable minority – 42 percent – of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 49 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty is a betrayal for Islam and Arabs (see Figure 47).

"Those that were teaching youths religion abroad were the Jewish Rabbis, who were disguised in Islamic clothes. They are the ones who engrained these false ideas into the minds of Arab youths. I learned this information in a lecture I attended in Jordan: after these youths are fed this false education, they are taken to Syria to fight. The objective of this is to destroy Arabs and Islam."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

President Erdogan enjoys some popularity but faces accusations that Turkey is nurturing VEOs.

According to some elements of the public, President Erdogan is a respectable figure and a proponent of moderate Islam. His relationship with the MB is regarded as positive, as is his standing with Islamism in general. Locals also admire him for purportedly sharing the local assertion that Israel constitutes a regional enemy. He has indicated this in a number of ways. For example, contrary to his more conciliatory attitude toward Israel in 2016,³⁹² he has in the past publicly denounced Tel Aviv's activities, likening Israeli atrocities to those of Hitler.³⁹³ One respondent concluded that these characteristics make Erdogan an effective communicator between regional Islamist groups and a valuable asset in countering VE.³⁹⁴ Accordingly, a majority of 53 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Turkey has a very or somewhat positive, while 26 percent reported that it has a very or somewhat negative impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). The existence of negative attitudes toward Turkey correlates with implications that Turkey has been accommodating training camps for VEOs.³⁹⁵ Several respondents asserted this, adding that Turkey is therefore culpable in the growth of extremism throughout the region, including Jordan.³⁹⁶ One respondent even claimed that Turkey has been cooperating diplomatically with ISIS.³⁹⁷

"Of course there are camps within Turkey, which train youths on a continuous basis because Turkey is on the border and it's easy to send youths from Turkey to Syria. I don't know exactly who trains them, but it could be the groups [VEOs] themselves in Turkey." (Female, 27 Unemployed, Irbid)

³⁹² Gurses, Ercan & Jeffrey Heller 2016. 'Israel, Turkey restore ties in deal spurred by energy prospects', Reuters, June 27, 2016.

³⁹³ Solaker, Gulsen & Jonny Hogg 2014. 'Turkish PM Erdogan says Israel "surpasses Hitler in Barbarism"', Reuters, July 19, 2014.

³⁹⁴ "There are a lot of people who are supporters of his [Erdogan's] ideas and approaches, and who see him as a balanced Islamist. He has an appealing personality to the people, especially young men, because he has a relationship with the Brotherhood [MB], Islamism and political parties. So they see in Erdogan that there is justice and development, and that his is the right party to effectively confront extremism." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

³⁹⁵ "I have to say that it is confirmed by more than one individual that know people who went to Syria via Turkey: all of them said that they are trained in Turkey and then sent to Syria." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

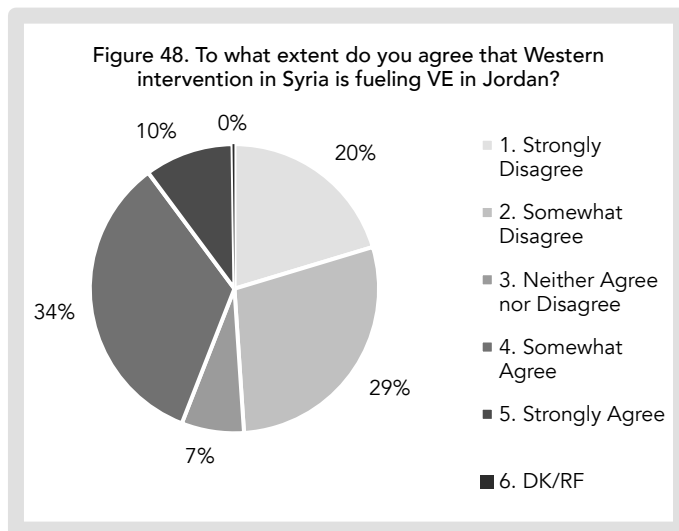
³⁹⁶ "I think Turkey is to blame for extremism in Jordan or Syria, or in general because most of the [VEO] trainings occurred in Turkey. Then they were sent to Syria." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

³⁹⁷ "There were talks between the Turkish government and ISIS, and they [ISIS] wanted to bring a spokesman to Turkey." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

5.2 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC INTERVENTIONISM

Respondents accuse the West of facilitating VEOs and seeking to disrupt the Arab world.

Though respondents were evidently cautious about criticizing the US (perhaps more so in light of the Jordanian government's amended April 2014 anti-terrorism law that forbids Jordanians from disturbing the country's relationship with foreign states),³⁹⁸ there were several implications of anti-US sentiment. For instance, one respondent linked the rise of ISIS to the US-led deposition of Saddam Hussein.³⁹⁹ In establishing culpability for local VE, another respondent even blamed the US for allegedly supporting ISIS in Iraq. This notion was to some extent influenced by the Al Jazeera channel and its coverage of US forces supposedly negotiating with Iraqi Kurds who forbade the launching of attacks in an area of Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁰⁰ There were additional claims that the US invasion of Iraq was motivated primarily – if not entirely – by economic gains.⁴⁰¹ Another accusation linked to US self-interest in the region maintained that Washington is not combating VEOs in Syria to its full capacity because it has a vested interest in a sustained Syrian conflict and/or the preservation of the Assad regime.⁴⁰² Considering these viewpoints, it is unsurprising that a large proportion of locals have a negative opinion of the West's intervention in Syria and its consequent impact on their own communities that suffer spillover effects from the regional conflict: 44 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 49 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Western intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 48). Accordingly, a considerable minority of locals regard the US as having a negative influence on Jordan: 36 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that the US has a very or somewhat negative, while 53 percent



strongly or somewhat agreed, while 49 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Western intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 48). Accordingly, a considerable minority of locals regard the US as having a negative influence on Jordan: 36 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that the US has a very or somewhat negative, while 53 percent

³⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch 2014. 'Jordan: terrorism amendments threaten rights', HRW, May 17, 2014.

³⁹⁹ "As for Iraq, Daesh recently emerged there. They were not present before. And even if there were some extremist groups previously in Iraq, there were not that many. They became more present and active in recent times. During the days of Saddam we had never heard about any extremist groups in Iraq." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁰⁰ "I blame America [for local violent extremism] because it supports Daesh. I watched on Al Jazeera how they brought the Kurdish area in Iraq, which is a high and mountainous area that overlooks Daesh support lines. They wanted to bomb them but they received orders from the Kurdish leadership that bombing shouldn't be in this area, which was support for Daesh." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴⁰¹ "As for the US, after they entered Iraq there were many acts of suicide committed by the US army soldiers - especially when they realized that the objective of the war on Iraq was not to end terror but to take hold of oil." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴⁰² "If they [the US] want to abolish Daesh or wage war against Daesh, they can enter a war against them and can counter these groups. But they don't want this because they have an interest in Syria [the Syrian conflict] or the Syrian regime." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

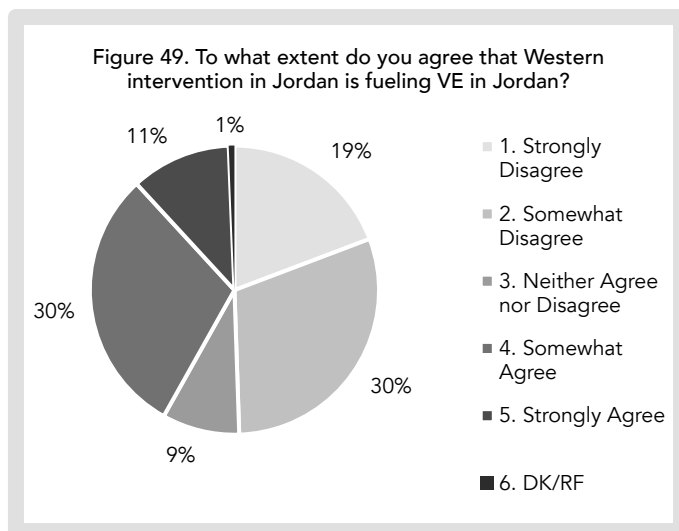
reported that it has a very or somewhat positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). The latter levels of enthusiasm for the US impact on Jordan are likely to be based in part on the substantial financial stimulus that Washington provides.

"As for the US, after they entered Iraq there were many acts of suicide committed by the US army soldiers - especially when they realized that the objective of the war on Iraq was not to end terror but to take hold of oil."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Many consider the West to be anti-Islamic, and regard its regional and local intervention as a driver of VE.

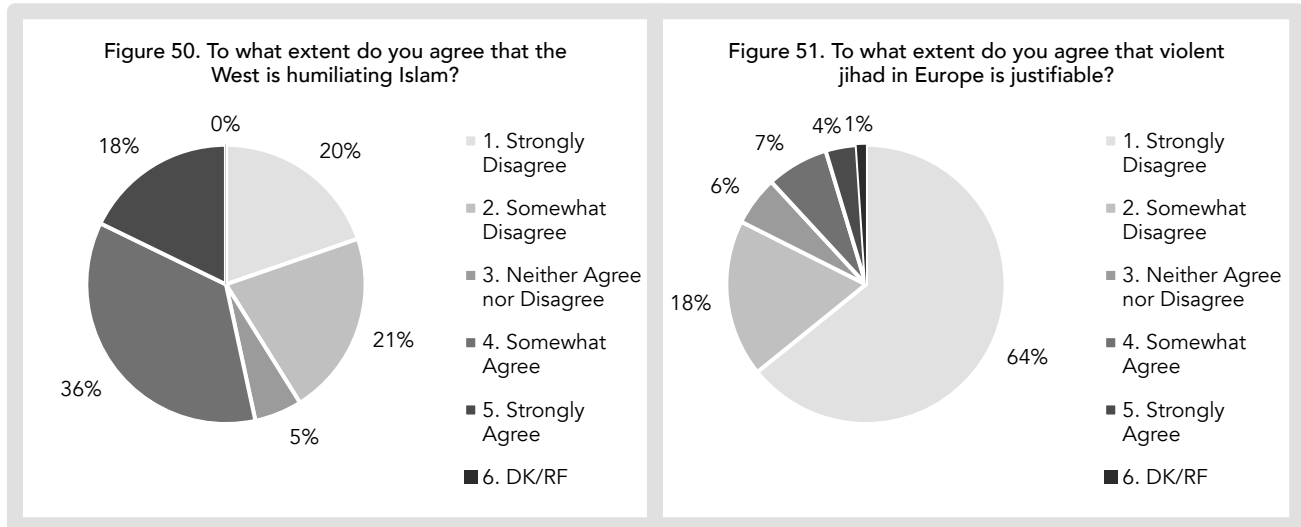
Aside from criticizing the US specifically, many respondents expressed broader anti-western sentiments. For example, there remain suspicions of Western motives in the region, with one respondent claiming that Western motives for embracing refugees are not benign, but based on imperialist intentions. Similarly, and most likely based on the activities of the US and United Kingdom, a significant minority of respondents was critical of Western activities in Jordan, and considered Western influences within Jordan a security hazard. This was evident in quantitative results, which revealed that a considerable 41 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed,



while 49 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Western intervention in Jordan is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 49). Meanwhile, 54 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 41 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the West is humiliating Islam (see Figure 50). Notwithstanding these anti-western perspectives, an overwhelming 82 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 11 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that violent jihad in Europe is justifiable (see Figure 51). Similarly, 52 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that the European Union has a very or somewhat positive, while 33 percent reported that it has a very or somewhat negative impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). It may be possible to conclude from these findings that public aversion to the West is disproportionately based on the US's policies in Syria and its interventions in Iraq.

"The objective of forcing Syrians into exodus to Europe or the US is not to help them but to get rid of Arab nations and Islam - to abolish Arab States and control them completely. Even when the US

took in 10,000 Syrians, it was not because of their love, but for other imperialist reasons.”
(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)



Despite beliefs that Jordan’s intervention in Syria is inflaming the VE threat at home, there is much support for Jordan’s participation in the anti-ISIS coalition.

In late 2014, Jordan pledged its commitment to countering ISIS as part of a US-led coalition.⁴⁰³ At the time, there was widespread disapproval of the decision, including from the MB and numerous members of parliament.⁴⁰⁴ However, since the immolation of Moath Al Kasasbeh in January 2015, attitudes toward Jordan’s participation in the coalition have been largely reversed.⁴⁰⁵ Quantitative results captured this new trajectory of locals’ opinions: 79 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while only 14 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Jordanian intervention against ISIS is justifiable (see Figure 52). However, that 14 percent opposed Jordan’s role in the anti-ISIS coalition reveals notable elements of lingering or renewed objection to Jordan’s military activities in the region. Not uncommon is the sustained belief that the US-led intervention in the region constitutes an imperialist project - something that Jordan should not be facilitating. This idea has provided fodder for local Salafist Jihadists and their diatribes against the state. For instance, Abu Sayyaf, Al Maqdisi and Abu Qatada have all denounced the coalition as a “crusader” campaign driven by “apostate” armies.⁴⁰⁶ Irbid resident Al

⁴⁰³ Spencer, Richard 2014. ‘10 Arab states join the US in battle against Isil’, The Telegraph, September 11, 2014.

⁴⁰⁴ Schenker, David 2014. ‘There’s a worrisome amount of support in Jordan for the Islamic State’, The New Republic, October 20, 2014.

⁴⁰⁵ Su, Alice 2015. ‘It wasn’t their war’, The Atlantic, February 05, 2015.

⁴⁰⁶ Sowell, Kirk H. 2015. ‘Jordanian Salafism and the jihad in Syria’, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, March 12, 2015.

Tahawi has also contributed to these criticisms, referring to a “devil coalition”.⁴⁰⁷ Additionally, there are fears that Jordan’s participation in attacks against ISIS may render the country more of an ISIS target and/or invigorate local violent extremists. For example, a substantial 38 percent minority of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 53 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 53).

“If it [the central government] wanted to do something like that [combatting VE] it would’ve closed the borders since the beginning, and would not participate in the coalition war on Daesh, letting other countries use it to bomb Daesh. On the contrary, it increased hostility and impacted Jordan. Most of these groups are hostile toward Jordan now because of its participation.”

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

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

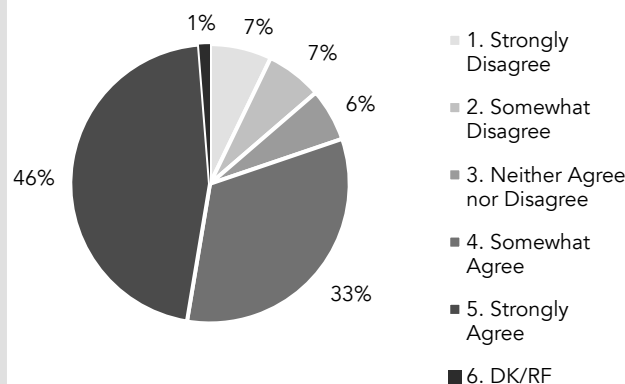
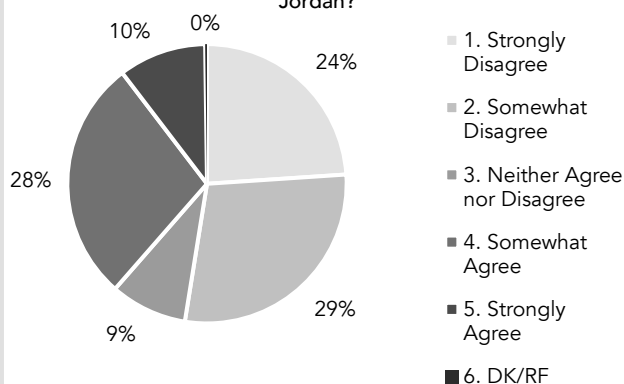


Figure 53. To what extent do you agree that Jordanian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan?



Gulf States are subject to criticism for supporting and strengthening VEOs in several ways.

Many of the locals who have travelled to Syria to participate with VEOs have been influenced by a variety of foreign sources before doing so. In numerous instances, these sources have been Gulf-based. For example, one individual who ended up with JN did so only after spending time working in the Gulf and meeting with a group of sheikhs while there.⁴⁰⁸ Such cases augment the local perception that Gulf States are responsible for the expansion of regional VEOs. For instance, a number of respondents implied that

⁴⁰⁷ Ammon News 2014. ‘Tahawi from Prison: “Daesh is not a bubble...and satanic alliance”, Ammon News, October 01, 2014.

⁴⁰⁸ “After a while he signed a contract in the Gulf and worked there...He kept on going to mosques where he travelled and he met a group of sheikhs. No one knows who they are, or what are they, but what we know is that their nationality is from the Gulf country itself... he is on the road to jihad according to the people who recruited him in this country of course.” (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

Gulf States have sponsored groups including ISIS, JN and Jaysh Al Islam,⁴⁰⁹ namely the KSA, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). One way that they are considered to have done so is through media. (For more on this, see section 7.2 The Role of the Media.) A second way is through Islamic ideological endorsement.⁴¹⁰ For example, respondents identified the KSA as the primary source of the Salafist Jihadist ideologies that characterize VEOs. A third way is through financial stimulus, with the KSA again singled out as a major VEO sponsor.⁴¹¹ Having acknowledged that the existence of distinct enemies is crucial for VEO support, several respondents also blamed the KSA for aggravating regional sectarianism and by extension fueling VE. Thus, they deemed Shia-Sunni tensions instrumental to the expansion of groups like ISIS and JN, which has largely depended on highlighting the victimization of Sunni Muslims.⁴¹² Despite these criticisms however, 56 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Saudi Arabia has a very or somewhat positive, while 23 percent reported that it has a very or somewhat negative impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). It is worth noting in addition that a sizeable 21 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Saudi Arabia has either zero impact, or neither a negative nor a positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). Thus, local antipathy toward the country appears to be predominantly based on its regional interventionism from which Jordan remains seemingly unaffected. A related criticism aimed at Gulf States is that they are not contributing to CVE efforts in Jordan, either politically or economically. For example, respondents decried the lack of support that their country is receiving from wealthy Gulf States to accommodate the large number of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. They argued that if there were more assistance to mitigate the growing social and economic pressures arising from this, fewer locals would be resorting to VEOs.⁴¹³ Yet another point of antipathy toward Gulf States among certain locals is their weakening of the MB, which is considered to have benefitted VEOs. The UAE in particular receives blame for facilitating the fragmentation of the MB in Jordan.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁹ "...ISIS and Al Nusra, which are funded by Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Qatar. I don't know necessarily whether it is Saudi Arabia, the Emirates or Qatar, but I am saying Gulf names from the Gulf who support these groups." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

⁴¹⁰ "I blame the Gulf countries because they are the first party who supported those radical people. It's enough that they support them spiritually. A year ago they decided to hang a secular person in KSA. There is also Al Jazeera news channel in Qatar." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴¹¹ "[The KSA] had a huge hand in extremism because they funded these groups in Syria to fight the Syrian regime. If they used this money to do good it would have been better. But they used the citizens and the opposition, providing them with weapons and money to fight the regime." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴¹² "I blame Saudi Arabia when it made us into this group, and created enemies for it. And in the same way it created hostilities and war in Yemen. It anticipated things and started attacking Houthis, creating enemies in the region for us between Sunnis and Shias." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴¹³ "The Gulf considers Jordan the first façade to defend areas of extremism in Syria and Iraq. And it is not supporting Jordan economically or politically with the presence of Iraqi and Syrian refugees. It was supposed that the Gulf should be the biggest supporter. They should provide greater support to Jordan so it can control the increasing number and the pressure on jobs and living, and so it can face these problems. Then civilians can have a will to live so that they don't revert to these groups. That is the idea. There should be support for Jordan so that it can control these pressures. Of course we blame these countries for this." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

⁴¹⁴ "I blame the UAE [for local VE] because it influenced governments, making them start with the Muslim Brotherhood - like what happened here. It's the influence of the UAE." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

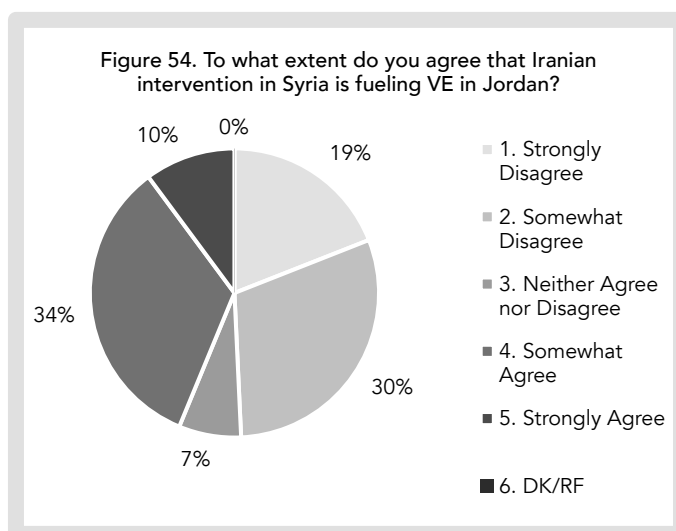
"Saudi Arabia is the source for religion. It's a big military place like in Iran and Russia and the US. Saudi Arabia gets funded by others. They have deals with ISIS or Al Nusra and Jaysh Al Islam. They take pride in this but secretly... The Syrian conflict is like a piece of cake and everyone wants a piece. As for the UAE, they trained many fighters and gave them money - you can see that in the outfits that the fighters wear. I also blame Qatar since they gave a lot of money to fighters and helped to open smuggling lines through Jordan and Turkey. There was an agreement between Qatar and Turkey to lead the Syrian conflict through Qatar."

(Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

Russia and Iran are criticized for backing the Assad regime and prolonging the Syrian conflict.

By extension of local hostility toward the Syrian regime, residents condemn Russia's interference in Syria and its support for Assad. Similarly, respondents blamed Russia for prolonging the Syrian conflict unnecessarily.⁴¹⁵ Accordingly, many hold Russia partly accountable for the growth of VE in Irbid, as VEOs use the Syrian conflict as a recruitment narrative.⁴¹⁶ Hostility toward Russia was also discernible in quantitative findings: 69 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Russia has a very or somewhat negative, while 13 percent reported that it has a very or somewhat positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). However, it is also noteworthy that 16 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported

that Russia has neither a positive nor negative impact, or that it has no impact at all on Jordan (see Figure 55). Likewise, respondents regarded Iran unfavorably, largely for the support it is lending to the Assad regime in the Syrian conflict. It is also more broadly accused, alongside the KSA, of exacerbating Sunni-Shia sectarianism through its sponsorship of Hezbollah.⁴¹⁷ Moreover, 73 percent of Irbid GQ respondents reported that Iran has a very or somewhat negative, while 14 percent reported that it has a very or somewhat positive impact on Jordan (see Figure 55). Additional quantitative findings suggest that it is not



⁴¹⁵ "Russia is a strong country and when it got involved in Syria, it was able to wipe ISIS off the map. But it's in their interest that the crisis in Syria [continues for a] longer time. When the Russian military left Syria, the Russian president said he was able to wipe them [ISIS] out but he wanted the Syrian military to do their work." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴¹⁶ "I also blame Russia [for local VE] because it supports the Syrian regime, and we know the Syrian regime since my mother is Syrian. It is a very despicable regime and very extremist toward Sunnis." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

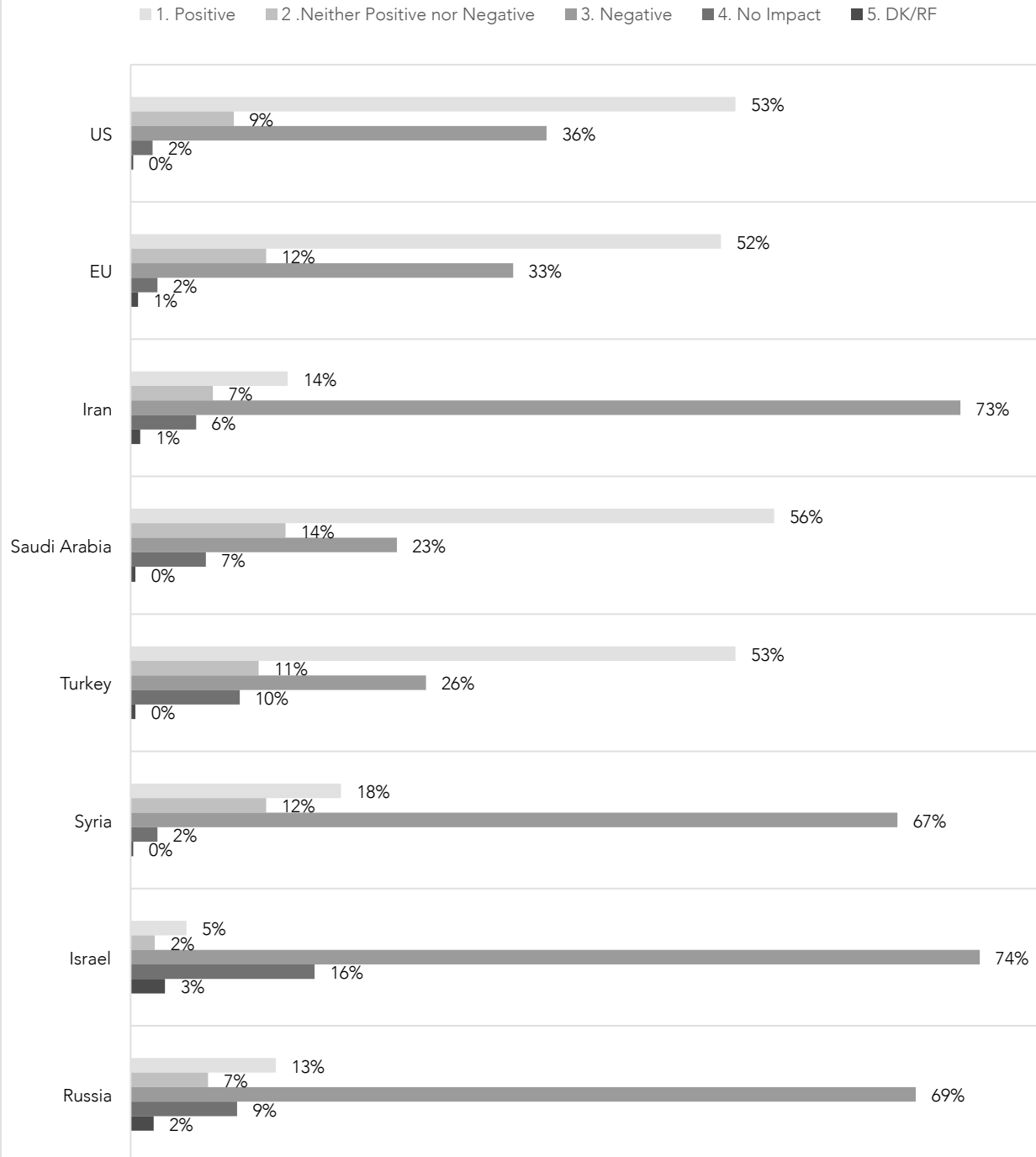
⁴¹⁷ "...the Sunni and Shia conflict: Iran and Saudi Arabia - they were people manipulating this extremism in one way or another through the events in Syria. For example, Hezbollah that is supported from Iran went to fight ISIS and Al Nusra." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

solely Iran's role in the Syrian conflict and the ensuing aggravation of VE that accounts for the perception that it is negatively impacting Jordan. For instance, though substantial, only a minority of 44 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 49 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Iranian intervention in Syria is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 54).

"Russia doesn't want the Syrian regime to fall and at the same time doesn't want to show hostility toward the Islamic coalition. But it can't keep balance and can't go out and say It's against the Islamic coalition and It's with Bashar [Al Assad]. But they support Bashar [Al Assad] and don't say that they are against the Islamic coalition."

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

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



6.0 COMMUNICATION DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

6.1 THE ROLE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROPAGANDA

Salafist Jihadists, including VEO operatives, use local mosques to vet, radicalize and recruit, but intensified security measures are inhibiting such activity.

Respondents considered social encounters with Salafist Jihadists to be instrumental in the radicalization process, with extremists typically favoring mosques as sites for meetings and ideological dissemination. Here, respondents claimed, Salafist Jihadists often single out potential recruits and offer them privileges to gain their loyalty. For example, due to the frequency with which mosques are attended, recruiters are able to closely observe their congregation over time and establish needs, desires or personal weaknesses. One respondent claimed that having carried out such an assessment, recruiters will attempt to seduce locals accordingly, whether it be with offers of money, religion, drugs or sex.⁴¹⁸ Such an approach is likely to have been employed by JN operatives to recruit a local mosque frequenter in Irbid Camp.⁴¹⁹ For residents this is particularly noticeable when extremists travel from neighboring districts to attend local mosques, as is sometimes the case.⁴²⁰ Occasionally, violent extremists hold gatherings and even sleep in local mosques across Irbid City.⁴²¹ However, the potential for violent extremists to use mosques as a platform for calculated radicalization is likely to have been reduced since the government increased its surveillance of religious activities (see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance). Additionally, Irbid's mosques are now shut between the five daily prayers, opening just 30 minutes before each prayer and closing immediately afterwards – only during Ramadan do mosques remain open all day and night. Another precaution relating to mosque regulations in Irbid is that male youths are only allowed to enter mosques when doing so as part of a family.

"When extremists see that one of the guys frequents the mosque, they try to reach him, try to convince him and brainwash him. They give him what he wants even if it is a cup of water. If he needs money they pay what he needs because they would've already asked about his financial situation."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴¹⁸ "They monitor the weaknesses of an individual and try to find a way to lure the individual. If the person is a drug addict for example, they could lure them with money, especially if they were poor. They can use religion as a means, and they can use sexual temptations and women to marry." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴¹⁹ "After he grew up, and the incidents in Syria started, he joined the Nusra Front first, through one of the mosques that he frequents in the camp area." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴²⁰ "The major way for recruiting is through mosques. When they see a religious guy who prays they start frequenting the same mosque even though they are not from the neighborhood." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴²¹ "They can pretend to be a preaching group coming to the area to preach. I mean, I see a lot of them who sleep at the mosque." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Elements of VE ideologies continue to be advanced by local imams, although the extent of their extremity is highly subjective.

Less discriminate promotion of VE by religious leaders also occurs in mosques, often seemingly endorsed by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. (see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance.) Respondents explained that this extremist engagement is typically conducted through a range of messages delivered by imams during Friday prayers, often focused on promoting Sharia principles and jihad against Jews.⁴²² Children who are frequently exposed to this preaching are thought to be particularly susceptible to extremist indoctrination. However, the recognition of extremist rhetoric – in mosques or elsewhere – proved to be very much subjective; it was dependent on respondents' relative understanding of religious extremism, which was not consistent across the board. For example, contrary to the majority perspective, one respondent doubted that there exist any extremist religious leaders within Irbid, and claimed that the public sphere remains untainted by extremist campaigning.⁴²³ On the other hand, for some locals the high profile and highly popular MB member, Ali Atoum, represents an extreme interpretation of Islam that he has demonstrated through his preaching at mosques across the governorate, including Hassan Banna Mosque.

"One time I heard a Friday prayer that talked about what women wear, though there are a lot of issues that are more important than this. But they focus on silly issues. I think the Ministry of Religious Affairs once ruled that it's wrong for men and women to be together at the same place and that women taking a taxi and being alone with the driver is haram. Those fatwas were made here in Jordan and announced."

(Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

Salafist Jihadists, including VEO agents, use post-prayer classes to indoctrinate locals while evading surveillance, and respondents identified a number of mosques at which this occurs.

In addition to main prayer gatherings, extremist preachers have occasionally delivered post-prayer "lessons", in which more direct ideological persuasion occurs. This is potentially one of the ways in which Salafist Jihadist clerics evade surveillance by government "monitors" (For more on state-surveillance of religious activities, see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance) and engage with potential recruits more forcefully and intimately. One respondent proposed that it is during these sessions that youths are sometimes directly recruited by VEO agents.⁴²⁴ Although the aforementioned security measures render such meeting increasingly difficult, the inconsistency with which the measures are implemented (see section 4.1 Central and Local Governance) may leave room for exploitation. An additional opportunity

⁴²² "Salafism preaching calls people to jihad but not against Muslims, only against Jews or anyone who is occupying your country." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁴²³ "I don't think that we have any extremist religious leaders in Irbid, or [any] that can be blamed for encouraging extremism - unless there was someone from these extremist groups that we don't know about. It is also possible for an extremist to spread these terrorist ideas by conducting gatherings with people, but not in a public place. They can hold such gatherings in their homes, behind closed doors." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴²⁴ "I don't know how fighters are smuggled into Syria, but I know they are recruited in sessions held in mosques - that they recruit people one step at a time." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

that extremists may exploit to advance their ideologies in a mosque setting are the typical 10-15 minute pre-prayer social gatherings (for men only). However, respondents suggested that it would be difficult for individuals to promote extremism on such occasions as the content of each conversation is exposed to the entire neighborhood when amplified through the mosque speakers. Furthermore, it appears generally to be the case that it is only the early phases of the radicalization process that occur in public mosque gatherings, after which communication tends to become more secretive (see below). Nonetheless, due to their centrality for VE radicalization, respondents regarded mosques as the frontlines in the battle against VE.⁴²⁵ Respondents mentioned two mosques in particular that have been used by Salafist Jihadists to generate support: Sadiq Amin Mosque (Al Shamali area, Hanina neighborhood) and Saleh Al Din Mosque (Turkman neighborhood). The MB is also associated with certain mosques, such as Al Barnam Mosque by the Islamic School building on Idoun street. This mosque is reportedly closely monitored by the GID. Some of the most popular mosques within Irbid include the following:

- In the Fo'ara area (Irbid Qasabah): Tariq Bin Ziad Mosque and Moath Bin Jabal Mosque.
- In Irbid Camp area (Irbid Qasabah): Uhud Mosque and Omar Bin Al Khattab Mosque.
- In Irbid City: Abu Bakir Al Sadiq Mosque (Abu Ashraf Circle), Petra street Market Mosque and The Big Mosque.
- In Hanina neighborhood (Irbid Qasabah): Musab Bin Omair Mosque and Al Salehin Mosque.
- Surrounding Hakama street (Irbid Qasabah): Saleh Abu Dabous Mosque (Al Nasreh street), Al Arqam Mosque (Al Tal street) and Abdullah Bin Rawaha Mosque (Al Bukhariah street), Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque (Sharqi neighborhood) and Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Mosque.
- In Al Barha village (Irbid Qasabah): Al Barha Mosque (Al Salam street).
- On University street (Irbid Qasabah): Noah Al Qudah Mosque, one of the largest in Irbid. The Mosque Imam is Ma'moun Al Shamali.
- On Hashmi street (Irbid Qasabah): Hashmi Mosque.
- Al Nozha neighborhood: Fahya' Mosque (located in the Sheikh Khalil Complex on Al Husn street). The Mosque Imam is Ahmad Al Mana'ie. The mosque occasionally provides food, clothing and housing for Syrian refugees.

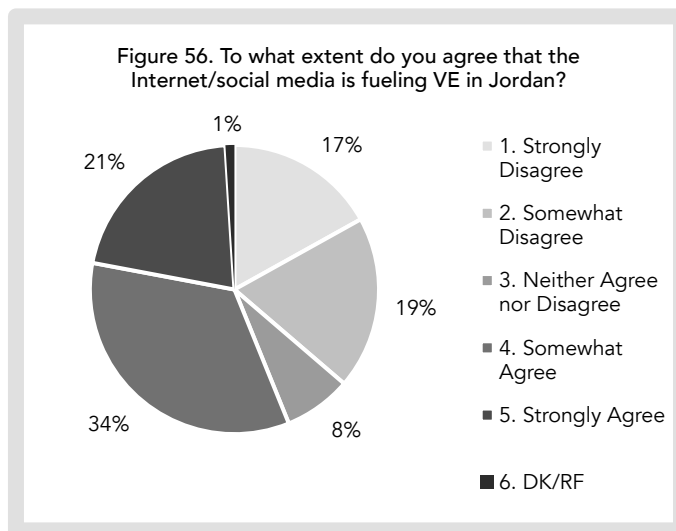
"Preachers can go to villages to recruit people, especially if they do so via mosques. They could give a lesson after a prayer, and some people go to listen to such lessons and then they [VE preachers] begin to convince people of some wrong ideas, and take advantage of them."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴²⁵ "As they are the main locations that make some people strict...What can we do inside of these mosques? Religious lectures and Friday speeches. These locations are the primary places to fight extremism." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

VE religious leaders communicate with prospective foreign fighters effectively through social media, but VEOs also experiment with other methods of interaction.

For VEO recruitment, a useful function of social media is that it enables the user to remain anonymous. Consistent with their concern for stealth, extremist religious activists are creating false Facebook profiles in order to influence local youth. According to several respondents, it is through these social media profiles that Salafist Jihadists often gauge the characteristics of local residents before persuading them to commit to physical meetings.⁴²⁶ Social media platforms also enable Salafist Jihadist recruiters to create virtual groups or forums that foster participatory communication between members, sometimes leading to VEO recruitment. Respondents mentioned two such forums: the Ahl Al Haq forum,⁴²⁷ which reportedly enables users to exchange messages before being physically connected to someone from the group, and the Jihad group.⁴²⁸ Another function of social media for VEOs is its enabling of distance-relationships and the establishment of bonds between VEO members in Syria and locals in Irbid. For example, one local girl was lured to Syria by a virtual lover through social media. This was after he had influenced her ideologically, indoctrinating her with jihadist sympathies. (A more detailed account of the story is presented as a case study below.) An additional example of online VEO engagement is through the Jareer Al Hosni blog, reportedly founded by Irbid resident Omar Mahdi Al Zaydan while living with his family in Irbid Camp (Al Zaydan has since joined ISIS, appearing in both Raqqa and Mosul).⁴²⁹ The local impact of these channels is deemed to be considerable, as 55 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 36 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the Internet/social media is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 56). Aside from using the Internet, VEOs have been known to pursue more old-fashioned methods of communication. For instance, there are reports from May 2016



⁴²⁶ "Some people began to create profiles that are fake. They monitor people, study their tendencies, their religious beliefs. They study those they want to recruit, to know how to recruit them or lure them. I don't know a personal story but I have heard a lot of things from neighbors or family." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴²⁷ <http://www.ahluhaq.net/>, accessed September 20, 2016.

⁴²⁸ "There are many Islamic clubs that recruit people. Like Haq group and Jihad group: you can sign in and write about Syria. Then you can participate and send messages...They use the Internet. I'm not sure if people were recruited using the Internet. I think that also Salafists use the Internet for the same reason." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁴²⁹ "They [violent extremists] use the Jareer Al Hosni blog, which was founded by Omar Mahdi Al Zaydan in Irbid Refugee Camp. Omar, who is a specialist in Jordanian promotion for ISIS, is one of ISIS's leaders." (Male, 41, Freelance Researcher, Amman - on Irbid governorate)

suggesting that ISIS has employed homing pigeons to exchange messages with individuals in Jordan.⁴³⁰ Several respondents confirmed this, with one claiming that Irbid's border areas specifically have been a destination for ISIS homing pigeons.⁴³¹

"Mostly they [violent extremists] connect through social media because this is how they reach young men and change their mentalities. It happened to me once. I got a friend request on Facebook and I saw the profile of the person: there were pictures of an ISIS flag and the black ribbon on his forehead; he had pictures of himself carrying weapons and he had a beard. I blocked him of course. But If I accepted his request he would've talked to me about himself, and would've asked me about myself, and he would've tried to convince me through religion and jihad."

(Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

Focus: Virtual romance with a JN Salafist Jihadist.

"The girl was normal but did not complete her studies because she didn't like school. She met someone on Facebook and fell in love: he was in Syria. She is 22 years old. I can't remember how old she was when she fell in love. But from what I know she knew him for a while even before the Syrian conflict, and when the war started he joined Al Nusra. They used to talk over Facebook and she tried to bring him to Jordan but it didn't work. He was supposed to come here to marry her and move to Syria for Jihad, but he couldn't enter Jordan. So then he tried to convince her to join Nusra and she flew to Turkey. I don't know how she paid for the ticket but she ran away from home and flew to Turkey where she met people to take her to the terrorist group. I don't know the name of the area where they met but it's along the border with Syria. Groups can enter to Syria through it. It wasn't the same person who she talks to who met with her in Turkey; it was other people with Nusra. When her family knew they tried to communicate with her and told her to come back, and they promised not to harm her. She told them on Facebook that she was in Turkey to get married to the guy she talks to, and when her parents knew he was with Nusra they tried to get her back. She used to tell her parents that she would take them to heaven. The girl thought that if she got married to him she would become a jihadist and be closer to God. She didn't tell us about her plan, and when we knew we were shocked. We didn't know what happened to her after that. We only knew that she got to Syria and then we lost contact. We don't know what happened to her next. We knew three weeks ago that she went to Turkey but she was away for six months. People used to say that the girl ran away for a guy and went to Jihad... I wasn't close to the girl because she was empty inside and she had religious tendencies without depth. She only got them from her parents - how to pray, fast and dress modestly, and that everything is Haram. She used to wear the hijab but with

⁴³⁰ Telegraph Reporters 2016. 'Islamic State using homing pigeons to deliver messages to operatives outside its "caliphate"', The Telegraph, May 05, 2016.

⁴³¹ "The other day they [the Jordanian officials] caught pigeons holding messages. It was between ISIS and people here who took the message. It was coming from Syria and it contained numbers and a telephone chip. It landed on the border between Jordan and Syria and it contained numbers." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

normal clothes, then she started wearing the jilbab and covering her chin because it's forbidden. She also started wearing cloves even in summer. We didn't expect she would go with Nusra. Suddenly her mind changed. Even her Facebook became supportive of Nusra. Once I opened her profile and I was shocked at how she talked about the importance of jihad and about certain guys who blew themselves up. Before she left she deactivated her account, then she re-opened it and told people that she was in Syria... She was uneducated and the guy attracted her to come using love. He never saw her but she used to see his photos but he never wanted to see her face because he told her that it's haram for him to see her. The guy was very religious. She used to tell us that the guy is very kind and that he loves her. Once we were sitting, and I asked her how she could love someone she never met. She told me that it's haram to meet and this is adultery. I asked her then how come you talk to each other. She said we only talk of good things. I think her strength and decision to go came out of rebellion. In some cases girls would rebel by taking the hijab off, but if this girl's parent knew what she was up to they would have stopped her. I think that her love for the guy and jihad made her take that decision, especially because she is empty inside."

(Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

VEO recruiters operate with a high degree of secrecy, but Salafist Jihadists are frequently associated with the spread of VE and VEO support in Irbid and are physically distinctive.

At the same time as being effective communicators, respondents indicated that VEO representatives exercise much caution in their activities.⁴³² For example, several respondents claimed that they were unable to name any VE religious leaders, perhaps due to the stealth with which they operate.⁴³³ Knowledge of such furtive behavior has heightened the sense of wariness for residents, some of whom believe that there are VEO operatives disguised as average citizens seeking to discover potential recruits.⁴³⁴ One aspect of VEO stealth is that as the radicalization process advances, recruiters tend to adopt more surreptitious communications channels. For instance, during the initial stages of radicalization, contact will often be made physically at mosques (or on social media forums as discussed above). But as extremist loyalists begin to be identified, recruiters try to avoid public interaction in favor of small private gatherings, phone communication or social media correspondence. Another sign of VEO-recruiter stealth is that they typically operate as individuals rather than in groups, thus reducing their social visibility.⁴³⁵ On the other hand, while VEO recruiters operate in secrecy when possible, respondents described Salafist Jihadists more generally as conspicuous individuals due to their distinctive attire and

⁴³² "The hidden groups are the ones who attract people without anyone knowing and they don't want to be known." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁴³³ "I don't have a specific name in mind. You know that these extremist groups are always working in hiding; they don't publish names, they help and recruit secretly, and they don't announce the names of helpers." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴³⁴ "They [VEOs] have people that are roaming among ordinary individuals that are always looking for people who they could recruit and benefit from." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴³⁵ "They [VEO recruiters] are not large groups, rather individuals acting on their own." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

facial hair (though the wider Salafist community may be similarly distinctive).⁴³⁶ This does not however, preclude their participation in recruitment campaigns. For instance, Irbid's most notorious Salafist Jihadist, Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi, is considered to have been instrumental in a number of recruitment drives for ISIS,⁴³⁷ allegedly even administering financial transfers for prospective recruits from prison (see section 3.3 Economy, Housing and Debt).

"In the beginning the contact is face to face, especially in mosques, so he [the recruiter] can attract whom he wants. But after that he can't be in the same place many times in order to avoid being exposed. Then he gets in contact either through the phone or through social media. What's important is to stay away from eyesight so he won't get himself into danger."

(Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

VEOs use propaganda to induce a sense of duty in prospective sympathizers.

Active Salafist Jihadists are using the concept of pan-Muslim or pan-Arab solidarity as a means of gaining support among locals. One way in which this is done is through visual or audio media aimed at sparking emotional responses. Several respondents explained this with reference to scenes of torture against Arab women and children (specifically that committed by the Assad regime), which ambitious Salafist Jihadists show to locals in an attempt to generate feelings of duty.⁴³⁸ Respondents supported this notion, claiming that most, if not all of those who join VEOs, are convinced that they are doing so for humanitarian reasons.⁴³⁹ It is unsurprising then, that the most powerful VEO message among locals is that they are fighting in defense of Sunni Muslims, Islam and/or Syrian brethren suffering at the hands of the Assad regime.⁴⁴⁰ Thus, this has the potential to translate into jihadist inclinations. Indeed, antipathy toward the Alawite Assad regime may help to explain why a sizeable minority of 46 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 48 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable (see Figure 57). JN is one VEO whose use of such messaging has penetrated local communities – notably the group's contention that it is acting on behalf of God to recapture Syria for those to whom it rightly belongs.⁴⁴¹ Quantitative findings revealed that though most locals do not associate the group's messaging with a rise in local VE, a sizeable minority does: 54 percent of Irbid GQ

⁴³⁶ "I know that Irbid is a place that has religious circles but we don't know if their actions are strict. Though they do look strict by having long beards, turbans and Afghani dress; these appearances show that someone is strict." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

⁴³⁷ "Abu Mohammed Al Tahawi used to recruit guys to join ISIS." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁴³⁸ "It's normal for a guy's thinking to change, especially when he sees an old woman being tortured and hit. These videos could be of their making, just to lure the guy, and sometimes when the regime offends religion they encourage them to join and fight the regime." (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴³⁹ "[VEOs are] telling people that they will defend the vulnerable. Everyone who joined Daesh thinks they are helping people." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴⁴⁰ "They also convince people that jihad is obligatory and that Syria is occupied by the regime and that we have to help our Syrian brothers because they are our relatives." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴⁴¹ "Al Nusra and other groups use manipulative messages to get people's attention; they say that this land is theirs and that they have to get Syria back. They believe that God is their president and that they only get their orders from [Him]." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 37 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that JN propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 58).

"They show you an idea or the voice of a guy who is torturing girls and small children so that your emotions of Arab chivalry start moving. As a human being and an Arab guy especially, you will be sad. And they start convincing you as a Muslim and Arab that your religion is demanding you to defend them and demand jihad of you. And they provoke you more, they know which groups they need."

(Male, 28, Self-employed, Irbid)

Figure 57. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad against Shias is justifiable?

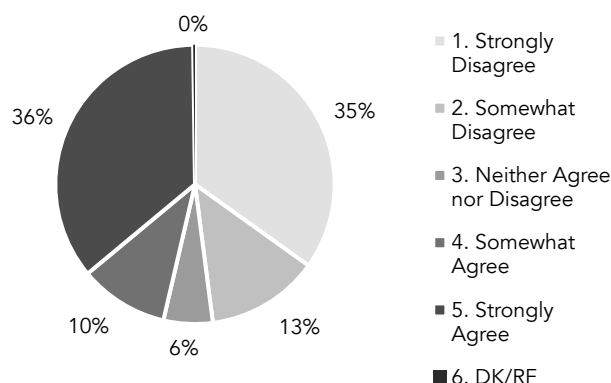
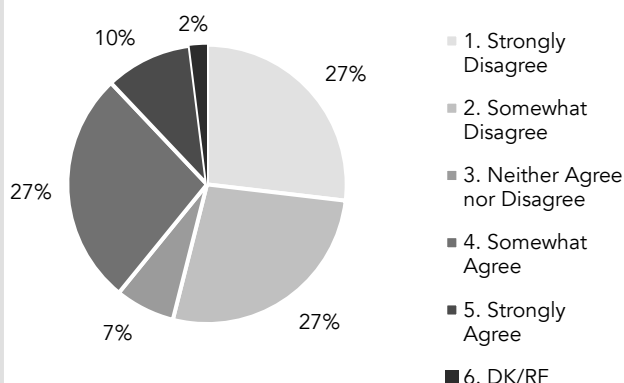


Figure 58. To what extent do you agree that JN propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan?



Salafist Jihadists and VEOs provide an easily accessible channel for anti-government grievances both in person and online.

VEOs have been active in seeking to exploit anti-government hostility among the local population in Jordan, and this has resonated among respondents in Irbid. This is achieved by presenting themselves as anti-state organizations through which popular grievances can be shared and channeled. One notable event that played into VEO anti-government messaging was ISIS's execution of Moath Al Kasasbeh. For example, ISIS has publicly claimed that the act was in retaliation to Jordan's participation in the "crusader bombing campaign, which continues to result in the killing of countless Muslims".⁴⁴² Many locals also hold the government and its role in the international coalition against ISIS responsible for the incident.⁴⁴³ Even some MPs have espoused these views, which have also provided the momentum for protest movements across the country.⁴⁴⁴ The strength of this message has enabled VEOs to portray themselves

⁴⁴² Dabiq 2015. 'From hypocrisy to apostasy: the extinction of the gray zone', Dabiq, Issue 7, February 12, 2015.

⁴⁴³ Finn, Tom 2015. 'Calls for revenge in Jordan as nation mourns slain pilot', Middle East Eye, February 13, 2015.

⁴⁴⁴ Finch, Ben 2015. 'Jordan vows to avenge Kasasbeh's murder', Open Democracy, February 10, 2015.

as the guardians of the public against the “regime”.⁴⁴⁵ Likewise, VEOs are successfully depicting the government as un-Islamic in order to establish a monopoly over religious loyalties. Typical Salafist Jihadist rhetoric in this respect associates the government with blasphemy and infidelity, pointing to its refusal to rule according to Qur’anic dictates. Testament to the local impact of these messages is the belief held by many that ISIS’s discursive material, which promotes each of these claims in one form or another, is aggravating VE in Jordan: a considerable minority of 41 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 54 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that ISIS propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan (see Figure 59). Meanwhile, several respondents asserted that Salafist Jihadists are approachable and highly persuasive communicators. It is unsurprising then, that some local youths are joining VEOs as an expression of dissent against the government.⁴⁴⁶ It is noteworthy however, that despite criticisms of the state’s participation in the international coalition, and its eschewal of Islamist governance, there is not a particularly strong sense among residents that the government is entirely subservient to the West. According to quantitative findings, 64 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed, while 29 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that the central government does what the West says (see Figure 60).

“It is known that the Salafist Jihadist current blasphemes the government and anyone who works with it. He [a former JN fighter] used to sit with me and tell me that these people who work with the government are infidels, and that the king is an infidel. This is because they don't rule by God's book. His entire interpretation was that every state should rule by God's book, which is the Holy Qur'an. This is their tendency: this state is a blasphemous one and they should apply God's punishments.”

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴⁴⁵ “They are promoting publicly that they are trying to save the people from the regime or from the Jordanian government.” (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴⁴⁶ “Some people go [to Syria] because they don’t like the Jordanian regime. So they do it as an expression of their rejection of such regimes.” (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

Figure 59. To what extent do you agree that ISIS propaganda is fueling VE in Jordan?

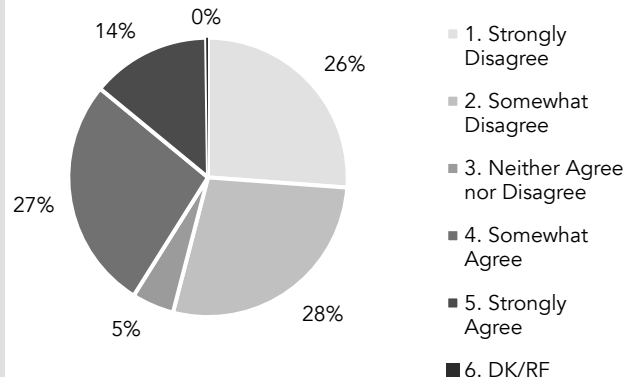
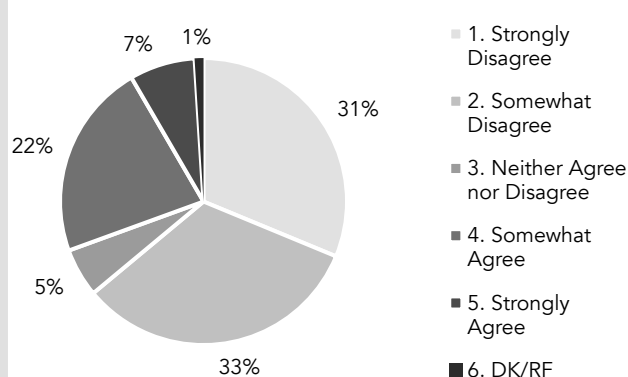


Figure 60. To what extent do you agree that the central government does what the West says?



There are several public CVE initiatives but many respondents do not believe they have a significant impact at the community level.

Most respondents recognized the presence of CVE organizations and activities in Irbid. This includes awareness campaigns that seek to promote a moderate interpretation of Islam and refute the ideology of VEOs. One local-based charity working in this field is the Al Farouq Charitable Society for Orphans,⁴⁴⁷ ⁴⁴⁸ which works predominantly - but not exclusively - with communities based in refugee camps, raising awareness, providing education and distributing aid.⁴⁴⁹ A second organization engaging in such initiatives is Al Rous Al Shamal, managed by Haifa Al Safadi. This charity focuses more specifically on anti-extremism campaigns, such as that undertaken during Ramadan 2016.⁴⁵⁰ A third example is the Women's Union,⁴⁵¹ located in the Bin Al Khattab building on Mustafa Hijazi street in the Nuzah neighborhood. This organization collaborates with experts to raise awareness on issues of VE and human trafficking.⁴⁵² A fourth example is the Mahmoud Tbayshat organization based on Al Husn street beside the Sheikh Khalil

⁴⁴⁷ Guide to Civil Society Organizations in Jordan, accessed July 26, 2016. Available at: <<http://www.civilsociety-jo.net/en/organization/709/al-farouq-charitable-society-for-orphans>>

⁴⁴⁸ Al Farouq Society 2016. 'A documentary film about the Al Farouq Charitable Society for Orphans', YouTube, April 19, 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ "Al Farouq organization has a large number of beneficiaries: Jordanians and Syrians all from the camp. They also help orphans and widows and poor people. Many people go to this charity and so it is very easy for them to create programs and raise awareness...they even serve people from outside the camp." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁵⁰ "Al Rous Al Shamal organization in Irbid: I have attended many of their activities about terrorism and extremism, which they conducted before Ramadan and which they will continue until after Ramadan. Haifa al Safadi is the director of this organization." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁵¹ Jordanian Women's Union: Irbid Branch, accessed July 26 2016. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jordanian-Womens-Union-Irbid-Branch/122297691245363>>

⁴⁵² "The Women's Union Irbid conducts awareness initiatives about violence and extremism, and human trafficking. They bring in experts to give lectures in cooperation with the ministry of social affairs. I have attended more than three or four events, each time on a different topic." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

Complex (Irbid City), which focuses on anti-extremism awareness activities. It is also known to arrange funerals for soldiers killed in battle. These initiatives have taken place in a number of public venues including Bilal bin Rabah Mosque, the Irbid Qasabah Municipal Hall, the Officers Club, the Hashemite Hall and Bayt Al Nabulsi. Other organizations and initiatives whose work is recognized – either directly or indirectly - as tackling violent extremism within Irbid include: the Coexistence organization; the ‘Jordan Charity’, managed by Yasmin Zoubi; the ‘Good Impressions’ initiative, implemented by Haitham Namarneh; the ‘Breaking Bread’ initiative by Othman Bishtaqi; the Bayan Daqamseh organization and the National Democratic Institute. Aside from CVE societal programs, some locals are encountering media personalities denouncing VE. For example, one respondent recalled having observed a clip on social media from the MBC channel in which a media personality censured extremist religious figures from the region including Sheikh Muhammed Al Arefe.⁴⁵³ Despite these efforts, there is limited public optimism about the sustained impact and range of these initiatives. Many respondents indicated that aside from the activities associated with extremist religious leaders, there is little else in terms of community engagement delivered by locals within Irbid. This is of particular concern in a society where locals place value on active citizenship, as claimed by respondents. Thus, for many, there is a risk that the only sphere of participatory social life is that of extremist circles such as the local Salafist Jihadist current. In addressing this issue, respondents provided a number of recommendations for the most effective platforms from which to engage with the community. This includes a number of popular parks such as Tariq bin Ziyad Park (located in the upmarket Talool neighborhood of the eastern quarter of Irbid Qasabah), Tunis Park (located in the eastern quarter of Irbid Qasabah), A’mar Irbid Foundation Park (located in Zabda, behind Irbid Mall, in southern Irbid Qasabah), Queen Zain Al Sharaf (Al Barha village) and King Abdullah II Park (located close to Petra street in Irbid Qasabah).

“The National Democratic institute also has conducted many lectures and initiatives on democracy and political life in Jordan - the pros and cons. In the beginning only Jordanians attended, but then they began inviting Syrians to attend because they also need to be conscious and integrate into Jordanian society, far from extremism. The Women’s Union has also conducted some lectures and forums about violence and extremism. But we need more of these for people of all ethnicities in Jordan so that we can reach all people: youths, young, and old individuals.

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

There are a few, but not enough, anti-extremist role models to compete with the influence of violent extremists.

Violent extremists within Irbid are socially active, and there are indications that their influence is such that some of them constitute role models for local youth. Consequently, when these VE role models pledge loyalty to certain VEOs, there is a risk that their admirers will strive to follow suit.⁴⁵⁴ Meanwhile, many

⁴⁵³ “I saw a program on MBC TV; I saw a clip of it on social media. The guy is a media person on MBC; he went and spoke badly of religious leaders like [Sheikh Mohammed Al] Arifi and another Kuwaiti guy, who made their sons go to extremist universities.” (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴⁵⁴ “Everyone wished their children to become like this guy [a local who joined JN] because he is religious and keeps things to himself, and doesn't hurt anyone, though the area in which he lived in wasn't a good area. He is considered

respondents deplored the lack of alternative engaging role models with whom to relate. For instance, when pressed, many respondents were unable to identify any legitimate “moderate” religious leaders in their locality.⁴⁵⁵ This is despite the presence of several moderate-leaning religious figures within Irbid such as those represented in the table below (see Table 1). In fact, though there were general claims about active moderate religious influences in Irbid,⁴⁵⁶ only one respondent provided a specific example of such a personality: Abdullah Abu Hayja’, an Imam who resides close to Irbid Camp and conducts numerous awareness campaigns across mosques within Irbid Qasabah, north of the city center, most notably Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque at which he is the house Imam. His campaigns, which he has been conducting since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, focus on promoting moderate Islam and undermining ISIS. The respondent described Abu Hayja’ as widely popular despite being appointed by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.⁴⁵⁷ Other moderate religious figures however, are evidently reluctant to engage with issues of extremism in public, either for fear of being misinterpreted or of breaching the government’s anti-terrorism laws.⁴⁵⁸

Table 1: Moderate religious figures

NAME	DETAILS AND ACTIVITIES
Jamal Al Batayneh	Based in Kafr Yuba, where he delivers public lectures. In 2008, he was the Irbid head of Awqaf. In 2015, he was the head of Awqaf in Amman.

a distinctive person from his environment, which always contains problems. But the guy is religious, and everyone does like him.” (Male, 21, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴⁵⁵ “Maybe they [religious leaders] would say at the beginning that they don’t condone terrorism, but when you talk to them you realize they do.” (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴⁵⁶ “Yes there are many religious leaders at mosques that have a positive effect in spreading awareness on the true morals of Islam, that what these extremists promote is not Islam and that going to fight in Syria is not jihad...There are many religious leaders who sense extremist behavior and interfere immediately through debate, after prayers or in public lectures to all the people in the neighborhood. The word of a moderate sheikh is always heard.” (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴⁵⁷ “He [Abdullah Abu Hayja’] conducted these awareness activities in the mosque - the Bilal [Bilal bin Rabah] mosque - and then he went on to other mosques in Irbid. He began to do this at the start of the events in Syria, and he is still doing this. People like him and listen to him, and of course this is all in coordination with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs...educating people on Islam, and about what Daesh is doing, and that it is corrupt and is considered to be a terrorist group with nothing to do with religion. He is still conducting these initiatives.” (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁵⁸ “There are of course sheikhs that are neutral. They don’t speak about these issues because they are fearful that they will be held accountable for their words. So they only speak about general things - not extremism and terrorism.” (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

Mohammad Yousef Abu Zaytoun	Based in Houfa, Wastiyah district. Though he is not an imam, he provides lessons in Omar Bin Al Khattab Mosque (located in the Houfa Triangle) in which he rejects extremism and refutes the idea that jihad in Syria is duty for Sunni Muslims. He also denounces JN and ISIS.
Gharabawi Abd Al Sattar Gharabawi	Based in Qumaym, Wastiyah district, where he is the imam of Qumaym Mosque. The content of his sermons typically revolves around discouraging the use of weapons, challenging extremist ideas and asserting the importance of law enforcement.
Abd Al Salam Nuseirat	Based in Al Sarih, where he challenges the influence of local Salafists during mosque appearances. He is currently the deputy director of Awqaf in Irbid.
Nayef Duweir	Based in Katam, Bani Obeid district, where he is the imam of Katam Mosque.

As well as a lack of moderate religious leaders, there is a paucity of influential public figures directly confronting extremism. One of the few examples about whom many respondents were enthusiastic is Dr. Mohammed Noah Al Qudah, the son of the former Jordanian Grand Mufti. Al Qudah is a major TV personality, admired by residents of all ages - both male and female - for his calm approach, moderate discourse and high intellect. This is despite a general local aversion to political personalities – a category with which Al Qudah is associated.⁴⁵⁹ He often directly addresses religious affairs on a number of TV programs and radio stations, raising awareness of Islamic extremism,⁴⁶⁰ telling stories about prophets, caliphs and the Prophet Mohammad's followers, and issuing fatwas. One example is the program Irbab Ma'na (Ride with Us), broadcast on IQRAA TV. Another is the Kawthar program, broadcast on Jordan TV Channel. Other programs include Sawa Ela Al Janah (Together to Paradise), Thawrat Insan (Human Revolution), Islamuna Al Jameel (Our Islam is Beautiful), Al Hayat Sahla (Life is Easy), Raqi (Sophisticated), Nahnu Awala (We have the priority), as well as hundreds of episodes of his weekly program Al Mizan (The scale). He has also featured in a collection of programs on Nourmina Channel: Hakayat Al Saleheen (Tales of the Righteous), Qesas Al Anbia' (Stories of the Prophets) and Qesat Ayah (Story of Qur'anic verse). Two final examples of Al Qudah's TV appearances are a number of episodes of the program Dhikr (Remembrance) on UAE TV, and the Ramadaniat program on Sky News Arabia Channel. In terms of radio broadcasts, Al Qudah has appeared on the Daily Fatwa Program (Radio Hayat FM station), the Ermi

⁴⁵⁹ "Mohammad Noah was a minister, and now he is a sheikh. He is considered to be a political icon and religious icon for people. Most people do not like politicians and are not convinced by them actually." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁶⁰ "Mohammad Noah Al Qudah is an individual that is highly cultured, aware and educated, and he is loved by all. He raises awareness against extremism and terrorism, and he represents the true foundations of Islam for youth. He has many lectures, and has conducted many forums all across Jordan." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

Hamak (Through Your Worries) program, the JAF radio station and the daily social program, Hamak Hami (Your Worries are My Worries) on the Yaqin station. Aside from TV and radio appearances, Al Qudah has also engaged directly in local communities. He has attended Irbid's Girls College and a number of local universities to give talks about issues of VE. For example, in 2012 when Al Qudah was the Jordanian Minister of Youth, he undertook a four-day campaign aimed at university students in which he addressed issues such as university violence, reform, corruption and the role of youth in the community. During this campaign he collaborated with a number of regional Islamic scholars - Dr. Aid al-Qarni (Saudi Arabian), Mustafa Hosni (Egyptian) and Mahmoud Al Masri (Egyptian) – and visited Yarmouk University among other institutions. Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that the paucity of moderate Islamic influences exists despite the government's insistence that it is regulating public religious practices to ensure that clerics adhere to state-sanctioned Islamic interpretations.⁴⁶¹ Indeed, even where state-sponsored moderate preachers are active, commentators suggest that their counter-extremist influence is negligible,⁴⁶² and they appear to command little respect among locals.⁴⁶³ As a consequence, extremist religious leaders have an unrivalled influence on impressionable youth. One solution that respondents prescribed was to encourage local religious debates that involve both extremist and non-extremist Islamist groups, such as the MB and the Salafist Jihadist current. Though this would provide a public platform for extremists to promote their ideology, it would also enable locals to witness informed rebuttals against the credibility of such ideas.

"As for the sheikhs who are on television, they are not heard by the majority of people. Only some are heard, like Mohammad Noah Al Qudah because he's a calm individual and he speaks in a respectful way - not like the others who speak very aggressively. The majority of them [sheikhs] do not have any real Islamic education background or real Islamic culture."

(Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁶¹ Booth, William & Taylor Luck 2014. 'To counter rise of Islamic State, Jordan imposes rules on Muslim clerics, The Washington Post, November 09, 2014.

⁴⁶² Su, Alice 2015. 'The boy named Jihad: from the ashes of the Arab Spring to the battlefields of Syria', The Atlantic, June 19, 2015.

⁴⁶³ "I find that mosque-sheikhs have a very negative role because they do not have the tools or training to inform people on religious issues, or to prevent them from becoming extremists. They only have a paper that they read for the Friday prayer, without actually playing a role in raising awareness." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

6.2 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Formal media outlets are viewed with skepticism, and face accusations of producing propaganda and creating VE tendencies in children.

Several Respondents criticized formal media outlets for neglecting their responsibility to raise awareness of VE.⁴⁶⁴ Furthermore, the media's ability, especially the online media, to convince its audience is hampered by the fact that many locals question the validity of published information.⁴⁶⁵ One respondent even claimed that most available popular media is dominated by government propaganda.⁴⁶⁶ This view was echoed in quantitative findings, with 50 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreeing, while 43 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press (see Figure 61). Correspondingly, and consistent with claims that the government is overplaying terrorism threats to garner support (see section 4.2 Law Enforcement), 60 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 35 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan (see Figure 62). Yet a more serious criticism of the media is that it is contributing toward the growth of VE by normalizing violence. The impact of this is especially discernable in local children, who are reportedly developing aggressive behavior in response to news of regional atrocities.⁴⁶⁷ This is not only through the images being broadcast, but also the narratives being promoted, some of which appear to complement some of the central messages advanced by VEOs. For example, one respondent maintained that TV footage of Syrian regime attacks on Sunni communities serves to strengthen local feelings of obligation to fight on behalf of victimized Syrians,⁴⁶⁸ thus indirectly promulgating the notion of "honorable jihad". Other programs potentially inflame anti-government grievances by highlighting local socio-economic problems. The Beat of town, broadcast at 20:30 from Saturday through Thursday on Al Ro'ya Channel is one such program. There are also implications that social media platforms are contributing to the appeal of certain VEOs. For example, the Palestinian Ramallah News Facebook page, which is very popular in Irbid, publishes items about conflict between Palestinians and Israeli forces, and dedicates posts to recent Palestinian "martyrs". This potentially reinforces the appeal of groups such as Hamas.

⁴⁶⁴ "I blame the media [for local VE] because there should be awareness campaigns on TV and advertisements and lectures, even in social media. Media only focuses on these topics [VE] when an incident happens and not constantly." (Female, 45, Self-employed, Irbid)

⁴⁶⁵ "As for the media, particularly the online media, it is full of lies and contradictions in the news depending on which source you are following. Like when the events occurred in Irbid, all the electronic media outlets were disseminating strange stories about them, and people began to share these incorrect stories." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁶⁶ "As for media, it is very weak and wouldn't dare to address these things [VE]. Most of it is just government propaganda and support - most of our media is like that." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

⁴⁶⁷ "There are people here who support ISIS. I have met many people like this and whenever a case of violence takes place in Jordan they support it. I think this is a result of what we see on TV. When kids hear of an explosion somewhere, they develop aggressive behavior and you can see it in what they say while they play with other kids - like saying that they will kill each other." (Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴⁶⁸ "Media plays a role in this. When they [local youth] see barrel bombs thrown at people they would immediately get affected and feel that they have to take action now." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

"The media plays a role in this. When they [local youth] see barrel bombs thrown at people they would immediately get affected and feel that they have to take action now."

(Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

Figure 61. To what extent do you agree that the government interferes too much in the Jordanian press?

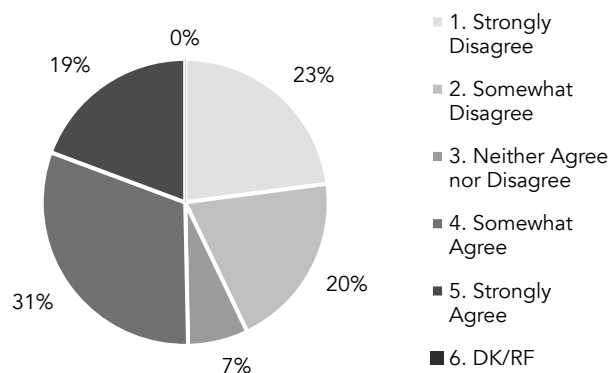
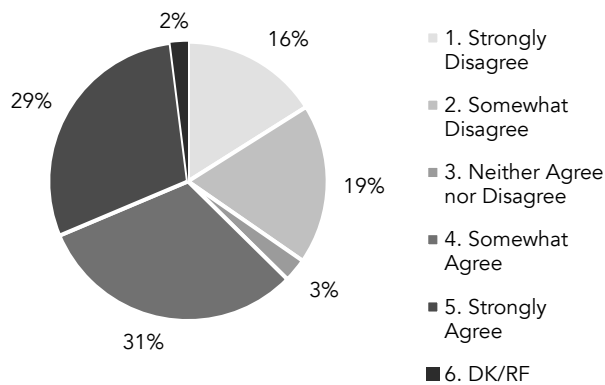


Figure 62. To what extent do you agree that the media exaggerates the problem of VE in Jordan?



There is a sense among some respondents that certain media platforms are complicit in the promotion of ISIS, especially Al Jazeera.

In attempting to explain the increase in support that Salafist Jihadists are showing toward ISIS (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs), respondents blamed regional newspapers, radio stations and television channels. For example, just as extensive media attention of Abu Musab Al Zaraqawi post-2003 served to elevate his global reputation,⁴⁶⁹ intensive coverage of ISIS activities may be strengthening the organization's appeal. By broadcasting and publishing news of ISIS victories and promoting an image of the organization that appeals to impressionable youth, these media platforms are essentially contributing to ISIS's propaganda campaign. Several respondents criticized this heavily, citing it as a major reason for VE in the area.⁴⁷⁰ One specific subject of reproof is the Qatari news channel, Al Jazeera. Respondents criticized the channel for broadcasting ISIS victories, which one respondent felt was done with suspicious efficiency.⁴⁷¹ An additional source of contempt toward Al Jazeera is its perceived amplification of

⁴⁶⁹ International Crisis Group 2005. 'Jordan's 9/11: dealing with jihadi Islamism', ICG, Middle East Report 47, November 23, 2005.

⁴⁷⁰ "We also have radios here that encourage radicalism. This isn't right to be encouraging people to be extreme." (Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁴⁷¹ "What you see in the channel [Al Jazeera] is enough to fuel you to become radical without thinking. I feel they were the first to support ISIS. I see that after just two minutes of an explosion carried out by ISIS they air it on Al

sectarianism.⁴⁷² In relation to other VEOs, ISIS is afforded something of a coverage-monopoly across popular media platforms. This has at least two potential consequences that affect the direction of VEO support. First, with ISIS dominating the headlines and other groups such as JN squeezed into the margins, individuals committed to joining a VEO are more likely to opt for ISIS if they have unrivaled familiarity with the group's activities. On the other hand, if groups aside from ISIS are receiving little to no media coverage, their atrocities may remain concealed. Thus, these groups' image is likely to be tempered, rendering them more appealing to less extremist elements within society. One respondent's comment encapsulated these consequences. She claimed to know little of JN and its violent activities due to its lack of publicity. This was in stark contrast to her understanding and exposure to ISIS.⁴⁷³

"Media here helped negatively by making a giant out of Daesh. If you notice the newspaper, television and radio coverage where they want to criticize Daesh or expose their reality, they present Daesh in an image of a hero that can follow planes, and has fighters who wear psychologically prestigious unified black uniforms and are tall and muscle-built...a lot of news about cities falling to them easily, and armies escaping in front of them. All of this news creates a different awareness in the subconscious, and this is the fault of the Arab media."

(Male, 50, Journalist, Amman – on Irbid governorate)

Jazeera Channel. I wonder, how did they know so quickly and get photos? I feel they know what they are doing."
(Female, 24, Receptionist, Irbid)

⁴⁷² "Al Jazeera channel used to spread sectarianism through its news and make people go against each other."
(Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

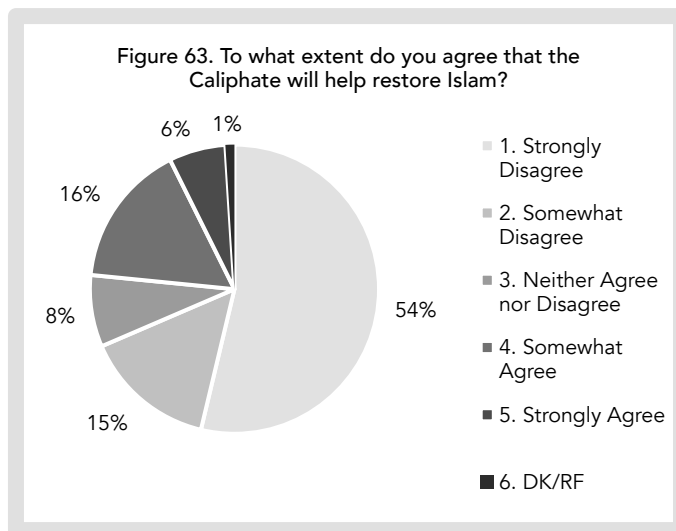
⁴⁷³ "I have not heard about Al Nusra, but I have heard about Daesh because they [JN] don't commit crimes like Daesh. Maybe they do, but it is not in the media. Even the criminal videos we hear about are all for Daesh. I don't hear their [JN's] name mentioned as much as I hear Daesh's." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

6.3 THE ROLE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Radical religious themes, including the idea that a Caliphate is positive, have resonance in local communities, and VEOs are exploiting them to attract support.

To reinforce the perception that Salafist Jihadism is the only legitimate religious entity, local extremist leaders are utilizing Qur'anic text as part of their messaging campaigns. Verses that expose government infidelity are especially effective, such as those denouncing non-Sharia governance or prohibiting usury. One example is Verse 44 of the Surat Al Ma'idah: "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed - then it is those who are the disbelievers". Another example is Verse 276 of the Surat Al Baqarah: "Allah does not bless usury, and He causes charitable deeds to prosper, and Allah does not love any ungrateful sinner". Such texts supplement the

more general rhetoric that calls for an Islamic caliphate, denounces secular governance as illegitimate and rejects Jordan's political leaders as apostates. These ideological messages receive varied levels of acceptance. For example, faith in the notion that an Islamic caliphate will be religiously beneficial is relatively low: only 22 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 69 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that the Caliphate will help restore Islam (see Figure 63). This might be explained by an implicit association between an Islamic caliphate and ISIS's agenda, of which the majority disapprove (see section 2.1 Support for VEOs).⁴⁷⁴ On the other hand, 67 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 26 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that Sharia should be the only source of law (see Figure 64). Similarly, quantitative findings revealed that 72 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 22 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that only Islam can guarantee justice (see Figure 65).



"They [VEOs] use the rhetoric regarding the leaders as non-believers, and say that the Caliphate must return. They do not want republican governance as they consider all such governments to be made up of non-believers."

(Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴⁷⁴ "For some people to follow ISIS and think seriously that it is the Islamic State, and it is the Caliphate - for sure this will be a disaster." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

Figure 64. To what extent do you agree that Sharia should be the only source of law?

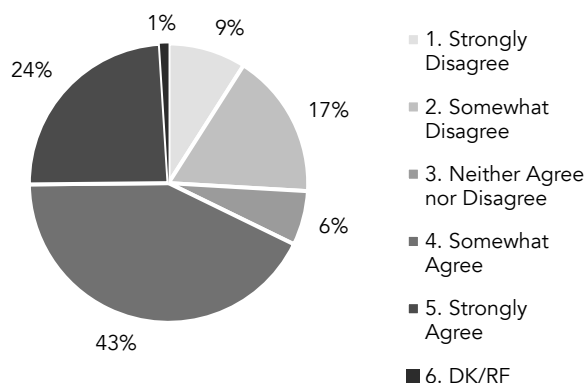
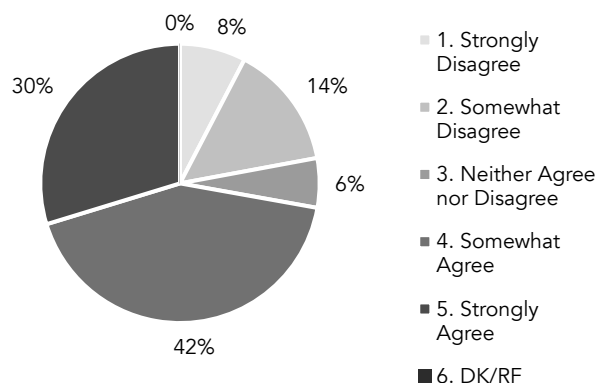


Figure 65. To what extent do you agree that only Islam can guarantee justice?



The majority of respondents believe jihad is justifiable in the case of Israel but also oppose jihad in Syria, indicating the potential for common ground with Salafist jihadists and VEOs.

While using religion in an attempt to distance youth from government loyalties, Salafist Jihadist messaging is simultaneously incorporating Islamic interpretations to attract them toward VEOs. Several respondents believed that these narratives are extremely powerful.⁴⁷⁵ Some of the narratives most frequently employed by VEO recruiters pertain to eschatological matters, which can be especially resonant with disenfranchised youth. These messages include promises of a heavenly afterlife and the attainment of martyr status upon commitment to a VEO.⁴⁷⁶ Intrinsic to these messages is the glorification of jihad,⁴⁷⁷ which at least one respondent recognized as a Qur'anic prescription.⁴⁷⁸ Other respondents were also sympathetic to VEO ideologies that have supposed foundations within the Qur'an.⁴⁷⁹ In fact, there is evidence to suggest that a large proportion of the local population believes in violent jihad, though this depends on the target in question. For example, 77 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or somewhat agreed, while 18 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable (see Figure 66). Yet to the contrary, just 21 percent of Irbid GQ respondents strongly or

⁴⁷⁵ "To get closer to God, jihad and fighting the enemies of religion and Islam is the primary motivation for joining these groups." (Male, 28, Computer Engineer, Irbid)

⁴⁷⁶ "It is also possible for an individual to be astray and unemployed and far from religion, but to be recruited through religion as well - saying things like "you can enter heaven" and "you can be a martyr", and some youths can be convinced even if they already are religious. They [extremists] use this to recruit them." (Female, 27, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁷⁷ "The messages they [VEOs] use are usually religious. They convince them [local Jordanians] that jihad is right and that Islam demands jihad, and that it is in the interest of Muslims." (Female, 26, Unemployed, Irbid)

⁴⁷⁸ "They [VEOs] also use Qur'an to attract people to join because the Qur'an tells us to fight the people who fight Muslims." (Female, 20, Activist, Irbid)

⁴⁷⁹ "They [VEOs] start to give you real evidence. I consider it real evidence because it comes from the Qur'an." (Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

somewhat agreed, while 72 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed that violent jihad in Syria is justifiable (see Figure 67). Less effective than their employment of Qur’anic text is extremists’ use of Prophet Mohammed’s sayings. One respondent for instance, claimed that these are often based on poorly sourced teachings.

“Verses like: ‘If you don’t judge by God’s book...etc.’. There is a verse that says if you don’t rule by the Qur’an you are an infidel, and this is a real verse...They come and say [that] the government forces you to take loans, and loans have usury. There is a verse on usury, so they try to get close to the people through the Qur’an and through verses and through some weakly-sourced prophet sayings.”

(Male, 28, Accountant, Irbid)

Figure 66. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Israel is justifiable?

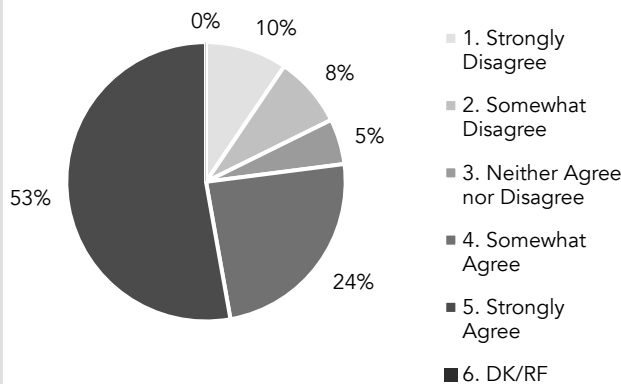
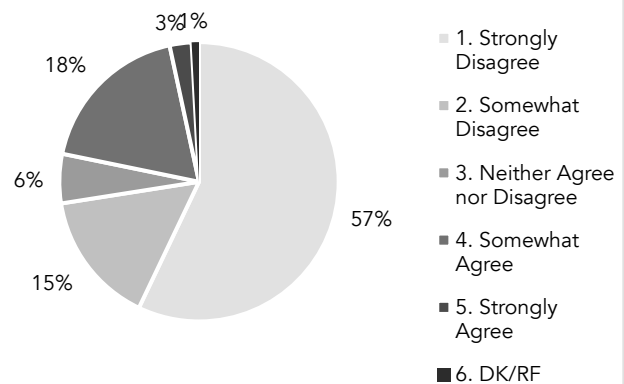


Figure 67. To what extent do you agree that violent jihad in Syria is justifiable?



Salafist Jihadists exploit public spaces and community gatherings to attract support and advocate for jihad in Syria.

A striking indication of local VEO sympathies has been numerous public commemorations, or “martyrs weddings” for deceased Salafist Jihadists. Furthermore, these events have provided a platform for Salafist Jihadist activists to wield influence. One example was the 2012 commemoration of Nasser Dalgamouni. Respondents explained that the event was well attended, including by many Salafist Jihadists dressed in distinctive clothing - they are known to wear the ankle-length *dishdasha* (a men’s traditional robe) – as opposed to the shorter “Afghan-style” *dishdashas* worn by Salafist Quietists. It was during this event that Abu Mohammad Al Tahawi gave a speech advocating for jihad, describing Dalgamouni as a role model and urging others to follow his example.⁴⁸⁰ Posters were also displayed to promote the honor associated with martyrdom against a Shia enemy. Another example VEO exploitation of public events occurred in late 2015/early 2016, when an elderly member of Hizb ut-Tahrir from Irbid

⁴⁸⁰ Luck, Taylor and Karin Brulliard 2012. ‘Jordan seeks to curb flow of fighters to Syria’, The Washington Post, October 22, 2012.

City attended a tribal *Diwan* (headquarters) at which a young man's family (of the Al Tal tribe) was asking for the hand in marriage of a local girl. The Hizb ut-Tahrir member (also a member of the Al Tal tribe) used the opportunity to approach people, denouncing the state's neglect of Sharia law and distributing pro-Hizb ut-Tahrir flyers. Having persisted after a warning by some of those present, the individual was reported and duly arrested by the GID, who subsequently imprisoned him. Perhaps a more prominent example of Salafist Jihadist public activism in Irbid is the 2011 demonstrations staged by the movement outside Irbid Grand Mosque in downtown Irbid City. This occasion also featured speeches by Al Tahawi, along with Sheikh Jarrah Al Rahahla, Saad Al Hunayti and Sheikh Muhammad Al Khatib, Imam of Irbid's Khalil Al Rahman mosque (situated in the western outskirts of the city on Ladiquia street). The speakers articulated several demands, calling for the implementation of Sharia law, the release of prisoners, the restoration of an Islamic caliphate, and some also advocated for war against Jews.⁴⁸¹ Meanwhile protesters waved Al Qa'ida flags and chanted various slogans, some in solidarity with Abu Mohammad Al Maqdisi. The demonstration's organizers also distributed posters prior to the demonstration that detailed these issues and advertised certain websites, including that of Al Maqdisi (Minbar Al Tawhid Wa Al Jihad) and a couple of jihadist forums: Ansar Al Mujahideen and Shumoukh Al Islam.⁴⁸² It is noteworthy that though Salafist Jihadists have used public spaces to promote themselves, they are reportedly never seen in Irbid's parks. There are also suspicions among locals that extremists are hosting their own exclusive community gatherings under false pretenses to promote their ideas. These notions have been either validated or fueled by past incidents. One example is the November 2015 arrest of eleven Syrian women on charges of spreading extremism during supposed Qur'anic memorization classes in the Abna' Hauran (Sons of Hauran) center located beside Alia Al Tal Mosque in Irbid's southern neighborhood.⁴⁸³ These women are thought to have been JN affiliates from Dara'a, who were intent on cultivating hostility toward the Jordanian government and inspiring political change.⁴⁸⁴ According to reports, they were advocating for jihad in Jordan and promoting the notion that the Jordanian government, police and army are *Kuffar* (disbelievers). Those attending the center were middle-class females aged between 18-60 who brought along their children to the classes.

"He died and his family celebrated his martyrdom. Many people from the area came and celebrated with the family. Many posters were placed stating that he was fighting the Shiites in Syria, and during the celebration people gave away sweets. Many Salafists also attended the celebration, and they were wearing military-like outfits."

(Male, 25, Media Journalist, Irbid)

⁴⁸¹ The Middle East Media Research Institute 2011. 'Salafi-Jihadist movement in Jordan threatens demonstration in Amman, warns of "storm of Jihad"', MEMRI, April 11, 2011.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ "A while ago, 11 Syrian women were arrested who were working in a Qur'anic memorization center in Irbid, because they were encouraging people to extremism." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)

⁴⁸⁴ "All those Syrian women from Dara'a that work in these Qur'anic memorization centers were always turning people against the regime in Jordan, saying that the regime was secular and oppressive, and that the government should be Islamic. They wanted to change the situation of the country entirely." (Female, 55, Activist, Irbid)