Governing the Caliphate

The Islamic State's interaction with civilians in Mosul (2014-2017)

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Note on transliteration and translation

In this dissertation, I have followed the transliteration guidelines provided by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). This means that some of the Arabic words are spelled without diacritical marks: Names of persons, groups, organizations, and political parties. Arabic words that have a widely accepted spelling in the English language are usually written without transliteration. There are some exceptions to this rule according to the IJMES guidelines, for example Qur’an and shari‘a, which keep the ‘ayn and Hamza but are written without diacritical marks.
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Introduction

“O Muslims, rush to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis.”

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, July 2014

The Islamic State’s rule over large areas in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2017 represents one of modern history’s most elaborate cases of rebels governing a civilian population. At its peak in October 2014, it was one of the most powerful non-state armed forces in the world, controlling an area of more than 100,000 square kilometers—the home of more than eight million people. With rhetoric familiar from other jihadi-Salafi groups, IS portrays itself as a revolutionary, anti-systemic movement that seeks to alter the existing world order. Its slogan was bāqiyya wa tatamaddad, “remaining and expanding”, and its ambitions for territorial expansion were, in theory, never-ending. In a July 2014 audio message, its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi underlined that the Islamic State was indeed a state, and that it would return “dignity, might, rights, and leadership” to the worldwide Muslim community. Seeking to demonstrate the irrelevance of the existing nation-state system, al-Baghdadi professed that in the newly established “caliphate”, “the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the

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2 I use the name the Islamic State (IS) throughout this dissertation, although the organization is sometimes referred to as ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and al-shām), ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or the corresponding Arabic acronym dāʿish. Exceptions are the historical account of the group’s rise, where I use the names of its predecessors, depending on the period: ISIS, ISI (Islamic State of Iraq), or AQI (al-Qa’ida in Iraq). In direct quotes, the version of the name used by the source is kept.
3 The estimates of IS’s territorial control vary, and depend on how one defines “control”. 100,000 square kilometers is a rough estimate of the areas where IS was the dominant power, although for a short period.
4 Brynjar Lia, “Understanding Jihadi Proto-States,” Perspectives on Terrorism 9, no. 4 (2015): 36. The use of the terms jihadi-Salafi, jihadism and jihadi is the object of debate. The political orientation of groups that are called jihadi-Salafi vary. In this dissertation, the term is used to describe extreme groups that have anti-Western and internationalist outlook and draw on Salafi/Wahhabi religious tradition or discourse. Jihadism/Jihadis have in common with jihadi-Salafis the acceptance of violence as a legitimate means to fight the perceived occupation of Muslim countries worldwide by “infidel crusaders” and apostate local regimes. Importantly, in this dissertation, the use of Jihad/Jihadi/Jihadism/Jihadi-Salafi must be seen as separate from the religious concept of jihad as a peaceful and spiritual struggle as it is used by many Muslims.
Easterner and Westerner are all brothers. It is a caliphate that has brought together the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, shāmī, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, maghribī, American, French, German, and Australian”. As Stephen M. Walt noted in 2015, IS’s message shares many characteristics with those of other state-building revolutionary movements in history. Compromise with its enemies is impossible; its victory is inevitable, provided supporters remain steadfast; and its model is universally applicable. For IS, governance of civilians was more than an unavoidable by-product of territorial control and economic dominance. Ruling the population in accordance with shari’a was at the core of its project and central its communication towards new recruits, the world’s governments, and Iraqis and Syrians.

This study focuses on IS’s state-building endeavors in Mosul within three fields: education, healthcare and policing. A micro-level study of the group’s governance of Mosul, the largest city under its control, is valuable for several reasons. Cities are power centers because they are economic hubs and anchor points for religious and cultural identities. Historically, cities in the Middle East have often taken on independent roles in relation to the state, and Mosul is a prime example of this until this day. Mosul was the city where IS had the largest room of maneuver to implement its state-building plans, and where it risked the most civilian resistance because of the size of the population. An estimated 300,000 people fled the city during the first year of IS rule, almost 30 percent of its original population of more than 1.2 million. An additional 200,000 people fled between mid-2015 and mid-2016. However, the restrictions on movement that the group imposed on the population meant that the majority of the population stayed in the city. This makes Mosul a good case for studying how the group’s behavior vis-à-vis civilians evolved during this period.

Education, healthcare and policing are central building blocks in the “caliphate” and part of the social contract in which IS promised security, justice and public services in exchange for taxes and subordination to laws and regulations. This study is by no means an exhaustive study of IS’s state-building functions, and many areas of governance deserve further scrutiny, including the ones studied here. Nevertheless, the three governance areas investigated here each in its own way sheds light on the complexity of IS’s governance project.

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10 For a general timeline of The Islamic State’s occupation of Mosul, see appendix.
Research question: In the three areas of governance investigated here, how do accounts from civilians compare to the image constructed in IS propaganda and bureaucratic documents?

The aim of the articles is twofold. On the one hand, their aim is descriptive, because they seek to draw a clearer picture of what was actually going on in IS institutions. With a few recent exceptions, this has been a black hole in our understanding of the group. My study sheds light on the inner workings of parts of the IS system in Mosul. I believe that descriptions of understudied corners of human activity like the intricacies of rebel rule have a value in themselves. On the other hand, the articles go beyond the merely descriptive and aim to enhance our understanding of the interplay between rebels and civilians in three areas of governance. Article 1 on education shows how unexpected reactions and opposition from the local population hindered the realization of an important part of the IS governance project. IS ambitious education reform was geared to serve its short-term military needs, but also showcased the group’s long-term ambitions to shape the ideal citizen of the new state. Article 2 on healthcare highlights how a rebel group’s conflicting policy aims can have direct and devastating results for the population. The health system, central in IS’s projected image as a service provider, became a “battleground” between IS’s conflicting interests. Article 3 on policing seeks to nuance the question of legitimacy for rebel groups in the midst of a war zone. Police forces were, along with courts, the first institutions established by IS in any area after they secured territorial control. Rooting out existing police and courts and policing the civilian population are crucial for controlling potential organized opposition. At the same time, the justice system was also construed in IS propaganda as a service to the population, providing long-needed stability, predictability and accountable justice according to the shari’a.

IS’s claim to “stateness” has been its main selling point and a number of analyses have sought to evaluate the credibility of that claim. It is not unusual that early, influential studies of historical state formation by scholars like Charles Tilly and Mancur Olson and others are
applied to some contemporary studies of rebel groups.\textsuperscript{15} This dissertation deals with the IS’s governance of civilians,\textsuperscript{16} yet it is not an attempt to measure whether IS’s structures qualify as state structures or not. While contemporary rebel groups can turn into embryonic states, that only happens when an incumbent state completely collapses or a territory is split up by outside powers,\textsuperscript{17} which is not the case in Syria or Iraq. Many recognized states fail to control territory and provide basic services, and many rebel groups succeed in doing so, without that resulting in a reconfiguration of the existing state order. IS has not sought outside recognition for its so-called state, and a claim to recognition is unlikely to have been accepted by the international community even if the group had managed to hold on to its de facto sovereignty. Hence, I find it more useful to move beyond the state and non-state dichotomy, and view actors in contested areas as nodes of power. As Sukanya Podder has described it, “[n]on-state groups in society, such as tribal, ethnic, religious formations, private businesses, traditional leadership structures, armed groups and customary justice systems, among others, create multiple nodes of power, resulting in fragmented and overlapping forms of sovereignty”.\textsuperscript{18} Instead of measuring rebel groups on a spectrum from non-state to state formation, I am interested in how rebel groups like IS use structures and practices developed by the modern nation-state, such as institutions, a complex bureaucracy, and symbols mimicking nation-states. As Zachariah Mampilly notes, such a focus does not downplay the integral role modern states have in “cultivating and developing such practices”.\textsuperscript{19}

This study is an “intrinsic case-study”, in the sense that it is motivated by an intrinsic interest in a specific case, IS governance in Mosul from 2014 to 2017, rather than a wish to generalize about a broader phenomenon or compare different cases.\textsuperscript{20} To the extent that I do draw parallels to Syria or other areas under IS control, it is when I see it as relevant to shed light on my specific case. Similarly, it is not my aim to systematically prove, disprove or refine


\textsuperscript{16} For simplicity, in this dissertation, the term “civilian” denotes members of the public who were not associated with IS. In the term “IS member”, I include combatants, their families, and those who pledged allegiance to IS but did not take on military roles. Certainly, not all relatives of IS members made an active choice to be associated with the group. Nevertheless, in my view, this distinction is justified in an analysis of IS’s governance system, as all the groups in the latter category generally had access to more resources and better services than those with no association to the group.

\textsuperscript{17} Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2011), 38.


\textsuperscript{19} Mampilly, Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War, 9.

specific theories. Instead, I use the theories to shed light on the specific cases treated in the three articles. Nevertheless, it is my hope that the study can be valuable to researchers who do wish to test theories or do comparative studies of rebel governance cases. This introductory part of the dissertation will elaborate on the wider geographical, political and academic context for the three articles. First, I will briefly present the status of the broader scholarly field of rebel governance, and review the existing literature on IS more specifically. Next, I will describe how historical, political and geographical factors interacted to enable the rise of IS as a major territorial power-holder. The third part will go deeper into the particularities of the IS project, discussing the role of institutions and civilians in its political vision, and elaborating on key concepts like legitimacy and social contract that are central in the articles. Part 4 is devoted to methodology, and discusses strengths, weaknesses and ethical challenges in dealing with my material. Finally, in the conclusion I will summarize the contributions of the articles and suggest avenues for future research.
Status of the field
Rebel governance

In this dissertation, I use the term rebel group for IS. This does not imply that I do not see the group as a terrorist organization, but analytically I find the term more fruitful than the more normatively charged terms terrorist or extremist group. I agree with Anthony Richard’s assessment that “terrorism is best conceptualized as a particular method of political violence rather than defined as inherent to any particular ideology or perpetrator”. IS certainly uses terror as a method of building its image, boosting recruitment, subduing civilians, and defeating enemies on the battleground. At the same time, its state-building efforts, which are the focus of this dissertation, show that IS is more than its terror methods. Using Nelson Kasfir’s broad definition, I see rebel organizations as “consciously coordinated groups whose members engage in protracted violence with the intention of gaining undisputed political control over all or a portion of a pre-existing state’s territory”. Rebel governance is the organization of civilians within this rebel-held area for a public purpose, which takes many forms with various degrees of involvement in civilians’ lives. Some rebels may have no interest in creating a government, but merely see in the population an opportunity for exploitation or ethnic cleansing. Yet, a surprisingly large proportion of rebel groups across the globe do engage in some sort of governance. Mao Zedong and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, still influential among rebel groups of various kinds, stressed the importance of rebels’ engagement with civilians when building an alternative order. Political mobilization of the peasants and provision of public goods were central for both of them. Rebel governments are likely to emerge in areas where state presence is weak. In the contemporary Middle East and North Africa, rebel groups have engaged in various degrees of governance in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Afghanistan and other countries. Yet, despite the abundance of attempts by rebels to govern in the Muslim world, this important field is surprisingly understudied.

Contemporary armed conflicts most often include non-state actors within the borders of fragmented states. Mary Kaldor described contemporary armed conflicts as “new wars”, characterized by rent-seeking, the involvement of criminal networks, and violence against

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23 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 6.
civilians. Yet, these traits have been the historical rule rather than the exception in war. Especially in policy-oriented literature, areas ravaged by civil war have traditionally been seen as political black holes and ungoverned territories. Rebel groups, sometimes called “warlords”, have first and foremost been described as agents of destruction taking advantage of so-called “failed states”, not as political actors seeking to create a new order. The Hobbesian view that only a state can provide political order still often prevails, even though examples abound of rebels that create institutions, adhere to ideologies, form alliances with local actors, and provide public services, sometimes even better than the incumbent regime. The traditional state-centric approach is also problematic because the absence of a monopoly of force is often framed as a security risk in Western societies and used to justify military interventions. In recent years, a more nuanced picture has started to emerge, and scholars have increasingly started to understand conflict as a form of order, and not the antithesis of the state.

Rebel governance cases are as diverse as civil wars, but several scholars have tried to identify common patterns in the behavior of rebels and civilians across space and time. Some have a political economy approach to rebel governance. Stathis Kalyvas has analyzed the link between a group’s degree of territorial control and the type of violence it uses against civilians, selective or indiscriminate violence. He concludes that indiscriminate violence will occur when resources are scarce and the access to information is limited. Jeremy Weinstein holds that resource-rich rebels – especially those who have external patrons – tend to be predatory and care less about governing civilians, because such groups tend to attract opportunists. Rebels in resource-poor contexts, on the other hand, tend to attract more “activist” individuals and engage more actively with civilians, cultivating ethnic, religious or ideological identities. Such theories of rebel governance focus on rational choice arguments.

32 Ibid., 147.
and downplay social and ideological factors. As Zachariah Mampilly holds, “the distinction between “opportunistic” and “activist” rebellions, despite its intuitive appeal, does not hold when one looks closely at the actual evolution of different insurgent organizations’ governance systems”. Few studies have attempted to explain variations within a given organization. In the context of a group like IS, a distinction between opportunistic and activist members simplifies the variety of motivations within the group, as well as the combinations of various governance styles within a group. Many circumstances can lead a group to change its approach to governance; it is not locked on a pre-determined path. Furthermore, it is a simplification to place agency only with the rebel leadership. Evidence from war zones suggests that the relations between rebels and civilians are more fluid and shifting. What sort of rebel governance emerges, is not just a reflection of the rebel leadership’s preferences, but also the result of some sort of negotiations with civilians and a range of other actors in the area. Civilians are far from being mere victims of rebel violence. They also engage with and affect how rebels rule, as is apparent in the articles in this dissertation.

Rebels’ violent behavior towards civilians has received more attention than its non-violent activities, but a growing number of studies deal with questions such as civil administration and service provision by rebel groups. Ana Arjona in her micro-level study of rebel-controlled Colombian villages concludes that rebels with short-term horizons will produce disorder, while those with long-term horizons will intervene broadly in civilian affairs. Furthermore, she theorizes that the quality of pre-existing institutions also determines what kind of order will emerge.

Beyond academic interest, rebel governance studies are important to understanding the power dynamics that develop under rebel rule and have a profound impact on civilians’ lives. Knowledge of rebel institutions can have practical purposes for organizations working to save

34 Mampilly, Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War, 14.
35 For an extensive literature review on civilian agency in conflict, see for example Shane Joshua Barter, “Unarmed Forces: Civilian Strategy in Violent Conflicts,” Peace & Change 37, no. 4 (2012).
38 Ana Arjona, Rebelocracy - Social Order in the Colombian Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3.
lives. Furthermore, it can give us an idea of the prospects for post-conflict peace, because state structures used during conflict may prove to be important for recovery and rebuilding when the conflict is over. After all, in most civil wars, the breakdown in social and political order accounts for the large majority of deaths, not direct combat. As Mara Revkin has demonstrated, the institution-building activities of armed groups call for reconsidering military strategies when targeting such groups, because the line between civilian and military targets is not clear-cut. Studies of rebel governance can help us understand support or resistance to counterinsurgency, and civilians’ reception of rebel governance often puts the weak points of the incumbent state on full display.

Existing research on IS

Due to the recent emergence of IS in its current incarnation, the academic conversation on the complexities of the group and its rule is still evolving. Important scholarly works seeking to explain the rise of IS have been published in recent years. To mention a few, William McCants gave a thorough account of the group’s history, strategy and apocalyptic vision, based on Arabic primary sources such as jihadi biographies, social media and religious sources. Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger situated the group within the global jihadist movement, drawing on intelligence and law enforcement documents as well as secondary sources. Joby Warrick has described the political context of its rise, drawing on CIA and Jordanian intelligence sources. Early works by Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, Patrick Cockburn and Charles Lister all illuminated various aspects of the organization. A number

39 For instance, in the second Congo war from 1998 to 2003, battle deaths accounted for approximately six percent of the total 2.5 million deaths, which were primarily caused by disease. See Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths," European Journal of Population / Revue Européenne de Démographie 21, no. 2/3 (2005): 159-60.  
41 The works mentioned in this section is by no means an exhaustive list of research on IS, but merely examples to illustrate the current trends in the field.  
45 Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, ISIS. Inside the Army of Terror (New York: Regan Arts, 2015).  
of publications have investigated the group’s history, its ideology, its media strategy, its finances, the background of its members and leaders, its foreign fighters, its recruitment and its rivalry with other groups. In addition to scholarly work, a large number of policy reports, research notes and papers by think thanks and governmental bodies have been published on various aspects of IS since 2014.

Some publications are built on leaked administrative documents produced by IS, available propaganda sources, or interviews with IS militants. However, many existing accounts have relied heavily on journalism and secondary sources, mainly because it has been difficult to gain access to primary sources from IS territories. This represents a limitation when it comes to accuracy, bias and underreporting. While excellent journalism has been produced on various aspects of IS, for instance by The New York Times and the Financial Times, most often journalistic accounts fall short of providing generalizable information on IS governance efforts. Because of security concerns, funding and the nature of journalism, it has to a large degree provided snapshots of IS governance, specific to time and place.

Studies of Islamist rebel groups are often categorized under terrorism studies, a field that has until recently been criticized for relying too heavily on secondary sources and a dearth of

52 Jamie Hansen-Lewis and Jacob N. Shapiro, "Understanding the Daesh Economy," ibid.
primary data. Partly because of funding and government interests, many such reports analyze IS through a security or military lens. While policy-oriented research reports can contribute important systematic insight into IS, they also have their limitations. Systematic empirical data are often lacking, and the group is often described in a language of “exceptionalism”, focusing on the extreme violence that has become its trademark, sometimes ignoring the wider historical and academic framework necessary to further an academic conversation on the group. Documentation of the group’s most violent sides is important, not least for any future attempts at building court cases against perpetrators. Indeed, the group’s violence has posed an existential threat to certain ethnic, religious, professional or other groups in Iraq and Syria. The true extent of IS atrocities is slowly being revealed since the liberation of its strongholds in Syria and Iraq. However, in the context of these countries’ recent history, the brutal acts shown in IS propaganda material and recounted by refugees are not as exceptional as is often portrayed in Western media and in some scholarship. It is necessary to move beyond the language of exceptional violence and situate the group in the context of theory already developed based on comparable conflicts.

Although many reports touch upon the issue of IS governance, comprehensive studies of this important aspect of the organization are lacking. Furthermore, most of the existing material on this topic describes the group’s activities in Syria, even though the group’s Iraqi roots and leadership arguably have been more decisive for its development, and are important in order to understand its focus on territory and governance. Iraqis have occupied a disproportionate number of governor positions in the “caliphate”. While IS’s forerunners only became active in Syria after 2011, they have had a continuous presence in Iraq for more than 14 years.

IS has produced immense quantities of administrative documents of all sorts: birth certificates, ID papers, medical certificates, speeding tickets, police files and so on. Documents indicate that IS had ambitions to regulate agriculture, prices on food and

\[61\] Ibid.
medicine, local disputes and crime. Moving beyond these realms that are usually regulated by states, the group spent considerable resources and paperwork on governing the private sphere down to the tiniest detail. Restrictions on clothing, haircuts, children’s play, social interaction, mourning costumes, language and other matters that are usually considered private make up a large part of bureaucratic paperwork produced by IS.

The unusual amount of documents produced by IS has been the source of a number of research articles and media reports. The fact that an extremist jihadi-Salafi group with a declared aim to bring about the apocalypse invests so much effort in bureaucratic micromanagement of civilians is puzzling. However, violent rebel groups often produce a wide range of bureaucratic documents. In Jacob Shapiro’s words, “groups as diverse as the Red Brigades, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), Aum Shinrikyo, Fatah, Qa’ida, and al-Qa’ida in Iraq generate organizational minutiae and paperwork that, were it not for their violent subject matter, could have come from any traditional organization”.  

Some of the media and research coverage of the IS administration has demonstrated the risk of conflating paperwork and bureaucracy with successful state-building. Even though documents give valuable insight, to a large degree they convey the group’s ambitions and self-projected image rather than actual implementation. On many occasions, the existence of a record that documents a function in the IS administration has been taken as a sign of efficiency and rigor. As this dissertation will show, there are many possible pitfalls in drawing such conclusions.

When seen in isolation, ten or even a hundred documents showing the implementation of a policy say little about systematic implementation in a meaningful way in a city of more than 1.2 million inhabitants. Thousands of complaints filed in some IS-controlled police stations tell us that these complainants had some confidence in IS as an upholder of order, but do not shed light on all the crimes that went unrecorded for various reasons. Furthermore, large parts of the available papers document ambitions rather than actual implementation. Documents describing educational plans, announcements of school start and reorganizing of university departments were distributed in areas where education was at a standstill for most of the period under IS. Lastly, many documents are not about governing civilians per se, but

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66 Jacob N. Shapiro, "Bureaucracy and Control in Terrorist Organizations (working paper)," (2008), 4.
67 See for instance The Islamic State, Mosul, “rumūz al-kulliyāt wal-ma‘āhid” (“Names of university colleges and institutes), specimen 81 and «idārat al-jāmi‘a” (Administration of the university), specimen 8X in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s online archive of IS records (from hereon shortened to AJTA), http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents. Note: The information about each documents produced by IS varies, e.g. issue date, title, or place of origin. In this dissertation, references include the information given in each document.
document military activities. For example, regulations on the use of internet and satellite TVs were put in place to keep intelligence from leaking out, and a clothes factory in Mosul was reorganized to produce military uniforms. Lastly, much of the paperwork on “governance” activities in fact documents activities that serve no public purpose. At best, it documents a strange prioritization of resources while fundamental public institutions were left to wither away. Forms that register mosque attendance and other activities by IS’ religious police al-ḥisba are examples of this.

The best available corrective to possible misinterpretations of IS documents is interviews with people who were on the receiving end of these “state” functions. Despite the possible caveats described in the methodology section of this paper, civilians who tried to go about their daily lives in Mosul are probably the best sources to describe what IS “state” functions looked like in practice for the people they were, according to IS propaganda, constructed to serve. To my knowledge, no substantial qualitative studies have focused on IS’s governance of Mosul, or combined the realms of governance investigated in my study, namely education, healthcare and policing. Interviews of civilians provide invaluable insight into the lived realities under IS governance.

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68 For example, several undated documents show the transfer of personnel from various ministries to the military. See for instance The Islamic State, South Ninawa, specimens 32Z, 33A and 33B in AJTA, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-2
Historical and political context

Heirs of Zarqawi

Despite IS’s sudden rise to prominence in 2014, the narrative of a blitzkrieg that has often dominated the media coverage is somewhat misleading. The rapid advance of the group did take many experienced analysts by surprise, and a consistent account of what made the occupation of Mosul possible is still lacking.\(^\text{72}\) IS and its forerunners al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) had decade-long roots in the country. They retained a continuous strong presence in the Ninawa region after being pushed out of most major Iraqi cities. Using Stig Jarle Hansens typology of different degrees of territorial control, AQI (2004-2006) and ISI (2006-2013) had a “semiterritorial presence” in Ninawa. While they were clearly inferior to the Iraqi state in open combat, the state did not have the will or resources to reclaim the area.\(^\text{73}\) Like other groups in similar positions, AQI and ISI engaged in mafia-like activities, including extensive extortion rackets, to suppress and control the local population. IS obtained a “relatively permanent territorial presence”, with all the increased possibilities that means for extracting resources in the open, establishing governance, training fighters and attracting foreign recruits.\(^\text{74}\)

Importantly, ISI and later IS were not merely a continuation of AQI, and the member mass of the two organizations overlap, but are not identical. Some of those who were associated with AQI later joined Jabhat al-Nusra, not ISI or IS.\(^\text{75}\) AQI’s influence over ISI gradually diminished as many of the original AQI leaders were killed and replaced by others whose background was in other groups. The early roots in AQI are nevertheless important in any attempt to explain IS and its capabilities at the height of its power from 2014 to 2017.

The group that would gradually evolve into AQI was founded by the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi\(^\text{76}\) in 2003 under the name jama’at al-tawhid wal-jihād. In 2004, the group officially pledged allegiance to al-Qa’ida under the name tanzim qa’idat al-jihād fi bilad al-rafiḍayn. Possibly, some of the young Sunni Arab men who would later join AQI were radical

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\(^\text{74}\) Ibid., 596.


\(^\text{76}\) Born Ahmad Al-Nazal Al-Khalaylah.
Salafists before the US occupation. However, the US occupation would be the spark that lit its fire. Zarqawi’s legacy was and still is a guiding torch for IS ideology.

Zarqawi travelled to Afghanistan around 1990 as one of many Arabs who made the trip to engage in “holy war” against the Soviet occupier. Although he arrived too late to fight the Soviets, he allegedly fought the Afghan communist regime that followed in the 1990s. In Afghanistan, he met his first spiritual mentor, the key jihadi ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. After he returned to Jordan, a terror plot landed them both in jail until 1999. After his release, Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan, where he began his relationship with al-Qa’ida. He wanted to bring “jihad” to Iraq, and al-Qa’ida gave him somewhat reluctant support to start a training camp in Afghanistan for jihadis from the Levant. Back in Iraq, he organized suicide bomb attacks targeting Shia civilians and coalition forces.

Al-Qa’ida leaders’ early skepticism about the Jordanian was based on some important differences that would later lead Zarqawi to break with his group’s initial sponsor and midwife. Firstly, Osama bin Laden’s deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri questioned Zarqawi’s strategy for wanton attacks on Shia Muslims, for both strategic and moral reasons. A widespread view among jihadi-Salafis is that Shia have strayed from the right path, but are still counted as Muslims and can – in theory – be forgiven for their ignorance. In a letter dated July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri asked Zarqawi a series of questions indicating that the former supported a more traditional, lenient view on the Shia, leaning towards converting them rather than slaughtering them: “[I]f the attacks on Shia leaders were necessary to put a stop to their plans, then why were there attacks on ordinary Shia? Won’t this lead them to reinforcing false ideas in their minds, even as it is incumbent on us to preach the call of Islam to them and explain and communicate to guide them to the truth?” Zarqawi, on his side, held the firm view that Shia were servants of the devil and traitors working with the Americans against the Sunnis. His grand plan was to incite sectarian war in Iraq by provoking the Shia. By targeting Shia leaders, politicians and civilians, he sought to trigger retaliation attacks against Sunnis and create the necessary space for his group to operate and win terrain. In 2005, his predictions became true when Shia militias started to retaliate, and by 2006, a full sectarian civil war had erupted. Key leaders in al-Qa’ida questioned the rationale behind the

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indiscriminate killing of civilians more generally. Atiyya Abd al-Rahman, a close aide to bin Laden, warned in a letter to Zarqawi in 2005 that too much brutality against civilians would make people doubt the justice of their cause. As he put it, “you need all of these people to destroy a power and a state and erect on its rubble the State of Islam”.  

Maqdisi also had an ambiguous view of his pupil’s strategy, criticizing both his attempt to incite sectarian chaos in Iraq and his killing of civilians.

Another point of disagreement was the timing for the establishment of a caliphate. While al-Qa’ida favored a step-by-step approach, Zarqawi wanted to establish a “state” even before continuous territorial control was secured. Despite diverging views on state-building, Zarqawi’s group was tolerated by al-Qa’ida’s leadership and the former pledged allegiance to bin Laden and took the name al-Qa’ida in Iraq in 2004. According to writings by Sayf al-Adl, the Al-Qaida military strategist who had helped Zarqawi set up his training camp in Afghanistan, Zarqawi had already aired his vision of establishing a “complete society” (mujtama’ mutakāmil) in 1999. The history of the group shows that it made attempts to secure territorial control already in 2004, and when it did, it was eager to govern the local population in Islamic “mini-states”. For instance, following US forces’ withdrawal from Fallujah in 2004, insurgents associated with Zarqawi were among those who became de facto rulers over the city for a few months. ISI also tried to found Islamic mini-states in the Iraqi towns of Haditha and Husaybah. Even if these governing attempts were scattered and short-lived, it was a sign of the importance of territorial control and governance for the group’s self-image. Already in April 2007, ISI announced that they had appointed ten ministers, including ministers for health, oil, agriculture and fishing. After military setbacks, the group announced a second cabinet of ministers in 2009. ISI’s obsession with declaring statehood did not only alienate the al-Qa’ida leadership, but also fellow Iraqi groups who supported

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84 The extent of AQI’s role in Fallujah is questionable, even though the Americans focused on AQI in justifying their siege on the city. See for example Roel Meijer, ””Defending our Honor”: Authenticity and the Framing of Resistance in the Iraqi Sunni Town of Falluja,” Etnofoor 17, no. 1/2 (2004).
85 Tønnessen, ”The Group that wanted to be a State: The ‘Rebel Governance’ of the Islamic State,” 55-56.
87 Al-Tamimi, ”The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence,” 119.
“jihad” as a means to liberate Iraq, such as the Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI). In an 2008 interview with MSNBC, the ISA spokesman dr. Ali al-Naimi elaborated on his group’s opposition to both al-Qa’ida and ISI: “Although the Islamic State is a great dream and a serious goal, we have objections to this statement [a statement from al-Zawahiri declaring the superiority of ISI in Iraq], and we have our own evidence that has purposely not been published proving that the so-called Islamic State of Iraq is not legitimate. The statement of al-Zawahiri do not obligate us whatsoever, and the errors of al-Qa’ida in regards to spilling the blood of the innocent are more numerous than can possibly be covered in a single response, statement, or interview”.88

Zarqawi was killed in an American airstrike in June 2006, but earlier the same year he had announced that the declaration of an Islamic State was imminent. IS’s governance ambitions became more pronounced in 2006 when it changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq under the leadership of Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. It justified the change of name with the fact that it controlled territory as large as the first Islamic state in Medina.89 Although at that point it was mostly wishful thinking, the group used its declaration of “statehood” to terrorize Sunni Muslims who worked with the government, which contributed to alienating Sunni tribes. These tribes played a decisive role in the so-called surge of 2007-2008, a period of buildup of American troops in the country in which tribes were given military support by US forces. Together with Sunni militias, this proved an efficient cocktail that rooted out most of ISI’s top leadership and reduced violence.90

After the withdrawal of US forces in 2009-2010, many militant Sunni insurgents who had the Americans as their primary target experienced an existential crisis,91 even if they adjusted their narrative to focus on Iraqi forces as illegitimate and the “new occupiers”.92 The sectarian discourse had been lifted to the forefront of politics already with the 2005 constitution. Subsequent policies by the Iraqi government led by Nouri al-Maliki from 2006 played into this new “raison d’être” for militant jihadis like ISI, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi from 2010 onwards. Maliki portrayed himself as a Shia leader ready to crush the Sunni Arab uprisings against his regime. Maliki violently repressed any attempt by the country’s Sunni Arab elites

89 Tønnessen, “The Group that wanted to be a State: The ‘Rebel Governance’ of the Islamic State,” 60.
to decentralize power away from Baghdad. Peaceful demonstrations against the government erupted in Anbar in 2012 and spread to Salah al-Din, Ninawa, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. Protesters accused Maliki of abusing anti-terror and de-Baathification laws to arrest political opponents. Protests were suppressed with indiscriminate violence throughout 2013. Maliki framed the uprising as a continuation of the historic struggle between Shia and Sunnis. By branding as “terrorists” all Sunni Arab groups who resisted his policies, Maliki contributed to the consolidation of ISI, which took the opportunity to craft alliances with Sunni Arab tribes and former Sahwa movement fighters who felt betrayed by the government. Simultaneously, ISI exploited the new civil war in Syria. The Syrian regime withdrew from northeastern parts of the country, creating a government vacuum that allowed militants to flourish there.

In the beginning, ISI’s presence in Syria went under the banner of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), but that organization soon stood on its own legs. In April 2013, the deep-rooted differences between ISI and al-Qa’ida came to the surface when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi changed the name of his organization to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), claiming that JN was part of it. Neither the al-Qa’ida leadership nor JN was notified in advance of Baghdadi’s expansion plans. The leader of JN, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, did not agree to this claim and turned to the central al-Qa’ida leadership to reaffirm his allegiance to al-Zawahiri. As a result of this quarrel, ISIS declared a break with al-Qa’ida. As Syrian rebel groups, including JN, forced ISIS out of western Syria, it consolidated itself in al-Raqqah and the border areas to Iraq. ISIS swept back into Iraq and secured continuous control over parts of mostly Sunni-populated territory, including Mosul. In June 2014, the group’s spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani made a statement entitled “This is God’s Promise”, which declared the establishment of a the Islamic State, a “caliphate” with al-Baghdadi as the caliph, and the stage was set for realizing IS’s state-building plans on a larger scale.

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93 See for example Tallha Abdulrazzaq and Gareth Stansfield, "The Enemy Within: ISIS and the Conquest of Mosul," The Middle East Journal 70, no. 4 (2016): 526-27. Among Iraqi forces’ massacres of unarmed civilian protesters were the events in Hawija in April 2013, in which at least 44 civilians aged 13 to 55 were killed, some handcuffed and executed.

94 See for instance Stern and Berger, ISIS. The State of Terror, 44.


96 Audio message by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, June 2014, “hādhā wa’d allāh” (“This is God's Promise”), https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the-promise-of-god22.mp3
The Mosul question

Insurgents in Iraq have long adopted the strategy of controlling cities as “safe havens” and training grounds. In Mosul, the ideal combination of social, political and geographical factors was present in 2014 for an extremist, Sunni jihadi group to grow roots and expand its influence. Ninawa province is deeply fragmented both socially and politically. The mosaic of ethnic and religious groups – some of which exist only in this province – has been a characteristic of Ninawa and Mosul for centuries. In addition to the Sunni Arab majority (today around half of Mosul’s population), there has been a sizeable Christian population, as well as Assyrians, Turkmen, Shabaks, Kurds, Yazidis, Armenians, Mandeans and, until they were forced out in the 1950s, an ancient Jewish population. When King Faisal was crowned king of Iraq by the British in 1921, it was still unclear whether Mosul belonged in Iraq or Turkey.

Representatives from the League of Nations who made a census in the city in 1927 to settle the question found – perhaps unsurprisingly – that ethnicity was not the most important form of self-identification among Mosul’s population. People’s concept of their own ethnicity was in itself fluid, and deemed less important than kinship, religion, or economic ties. Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, ethnicity and religion became more pronounced political categories as Saddam launched an Arabization campaign aimed at limiting the influence of the Kurds in Ninawa. Hundreds of Kurdish families were forced to abandon their ancestral homes. Following the 2003 US occupation and the strengthening of Kurdish military presence in Ninawa, families were again uprooted as many Sunni Arabs who had settled in the area under the Arabization campaign were pushed to flee.

For centuries, the different ethnic and religious communities had coexisted and created a thriving city where a myriad of languages were spoken in the markets. The city’s different communities were interwoven within most neighborhoods. To a large degree, this is still the case.

Situated at the crossroads between empires, the historic Mosul located on the west bank of the Tigris was a center for international trade and part of “a broad region within which goods, people, ideas, 

98 Sarah D. Shields, Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells (State University of New York Press, 2000), 189.
101 This is in contrast to Baghdad, which has seen a clear ethnic and religious segregation of neighborhoods since 2003, and a decrease in mixed neighborhoods.
and currencies were exchanged”.

Next to Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, and Baghdad, Mosul was one of the principal administrative centers in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Following the explosive population growth in Middle Eastern capital cities in the beginning of the 20th century, Mosul ended up in the shadow of Baghdad, both politically and demographically, during the interwar period.

With the advent of sectarian-colored politics in modern history, the complex social fabric has proven easy to exploit for politicians and insurgent groups. As in the rest of Iraq, sectarian tension has tended to become more pronounced in periods when the central state power is weak or when regional conflicts flare up.

Ninawa’s growing status as a militant Sunni stronghold must be seen in connection with Saddam Hussein’s ḥamla imāniyya, the Faith Campaign in the 1990s, in which Ninawa was especially targeted. One of the three institutes for Qurʾan studies that were set up by Saddam – preaching a politicized Ba’th-friendly Islam – was located in Ninawa. The Faith Campaign was a break with the secularism that had underpinned the Ba’thi vision of a modern, Arab, socialist society. Saddam’s increased use of religious symbolism and laws, building Islamic networks and institutions were not motivated by sympathy for Islamism or Salafism. On the contrary, it was designed partly to contain radical Islamist currents that could pose a threat to the regime, by controlling them and attempting to counterbalance the influence of the Iranian revolution. Nevertheless, in the long run it contributed to a stronger Salafi influence in the country, both those in favor of and those opposed to the Ba’th government.

As radical Sunni groups gained momentum and dominance in Mosul after the American invasion in 2003, especially in the western part of the city, Mosul became a more hostile environment for other ethnic and religious groups. AQI, later ISI, and other movements specifically targeted Christians and Shabaks to try to force them out. This was combined with vehicle-borne suicide bombs against provincial government targets, Iraqi security forces, and

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103 Dina Rizk Khoury, "Political Relations Between City and State in the Middle East, 1700-1850," in The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750-1950, ed. Peter Sluglett (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 78.
104 The staggering number of public events and meetings organized by Ba’th Party branches gives an indication of the regime’s outreach ambitions. As the Faith Campaign proceeded, these events became increasingly religious in nature. For instance, 637 meetings were held in Ninawa during 1999. Joseph Sassoon, Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th party: inside an authoritarian regime (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 79.
Kurdish political party offices,\textsuperscript{106} in an effort to disrupt the US-initiated democratic process and present themselves as the protectors of the Sunni Arab population. According to some observers, the socially fragmented nature of the city long prevented the development of Sahwa movements there.\textsuperscript{107}

Unfortunately for Mosul’s inhabitants, Zarqawi had a penchant for Iraq and Mosul from early on. For both strategic and more emotional reasons, he saw it as an appropriate place to build a future Islamic society. According to Sayf al-Adl’s writings, he anticipated that the Americans would invade Iraq after Afghanistan, creating the necessary chaos. However, Zarqawi also wanted to reenact an episode in early Islamic history that had Mosul at its center: The military commander Nour al-Din Zangi’s campaign to retake the Al-Aqsa mosque from the Crusaders was launched from Mosul.\textsuperscript{108} Ninawa’s geographical location close to Syria and Turkey proved to be ideal for the consolidation of AQI, IS’s forerunner, in the area. In post-2003 Iraq, Mosul’s location facilitated smuggling of weapons, funds, and foreign fighters who would later become a base of human resources for the IS proto-state. The economic importance of Mosul made it a natural economic and logistical hub for ISI after the withdrawal of US forces. It increasingly relied on oil theft and mafia tactics for funding. The inhabitants of Mosul were the main victims as extortion and abductions became part of everyday life. In the words of a local journalist working for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting: “Merchants in every conceivable sector give a levy to al-Qaeda.\textsuperscript{109} Payments to the group enable the local economy to function, keeping markets stocked with essential goods and guaranteeing the passage of construction materials and farm produce across the nearby borders”.\textsuperscript{110} Refusing to pay taxes to ISI/ISIS could result in businesses, large and small, being targeted in bomb attacks.\textsuperscript{111} Some churches in Mosul was forced to pay so-called \textit{jiziya} to the group. For instance, a Chaldean bishop in the city was assassinated after churches stopped paying this “religious tax”.\textsuperscript{112} While historically, \textit{jiziya} was a protection tax imposed on Christians and Jews by Muslim rulers,

\textsuperscript{106} Michael Knights, ”Al-Qa’ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation,” \textit{CTC Sentinel} 1, no. 7 (2008).
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} See Nelly Lahoud’s analysis of AQI’s development in Al-Ubaydi et al., ”The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State,” 11-12. As Lahoud notes, al-Baghdadi made his famous first speech in Mosul’s Nouri mosque, which was built by Nour al-Din.
\textsuperscript{109} The group was commonly referred to as Al-Qaida by Maslawis, also after it formally changed its name to ISL.
AQI, ISI, ISIS and IS used it as a means of extortion. According to some estimates, the group got up to 80 percent of its funding from the city after the 2004 withdrawal of US forces from the area.\footnote{Plebani, "Ninawa Province: Al-Qa’ida’s Remaining Stronghold," 21.} An Iraqi intelligence officer interviewed by AP estimated that ISI drew up to 1.5 million USD from Mosul a month in 2013.\footnote{"In northern Iraqi city, al-Qaida gathers strength," Associated Press 20 June 2013.}

These activities helped keep Mosul a lawless environment, aided by an abundance of weapons that were available after the looting of several American ammunition storage depots in and around Mosul, as in other locations.\footnote{"The proliferation of weapons in general, even under Saddam, became clear after 2003. After the fall of the regime, the US administration did no real effort to clear out the massive arsenals around the country. See for instance Charles Tripp, The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45.} By 2008, the center of gravity for the Iraqi insurgency had shifted from Anbar and Baghdad to the north. According to Olive Group’s databases, violent incidents in Ninawa increased from 463 per month in January 2007 to 685 in January 2008, at the same time as Baghdad saw a sharp decline in incidents.\footnote{Numbers are from Knights, "Al-Qa’ida in Iraq: Lessons from the Mosul Security Operation."} As the largest urban center in northern Iraq, Mosul became a new focal point for Sunni Arab insurgent groups of various brands, further emboldened by the withdrawal of US forces from Iraqi cities in 2009. A large number of former Saddam era officers dwelled in Mosul. The lines between ISI, similar takfiri groups, and more Ba’thist dominated networks were often blurred. ISI sought to dominate other groups in Mosul including jaysh rija’il-tariqa al-naqshabandiyya and anṣar al-islam, and was behind most of the bombings in the city. After cuts in defense budgets by the Maliki government the same year because of falling oil prices, Mosul was left understaffed by police officers and security forces.\footnote{Benraad, "Iraq's Enduring al-Qaeda Challenge."} Furthermore, locals feared retribution from ISI if they cooperated with Iraqi security forces.

The faltering economy affected the level of corruption and created an environment where ISI could easily bribe Iraqi officers and others to facilitate attacks and prison breaks. The “Breaking the Walls” campaign initiated in July 2012 aimed to free veteran AQI members from prisons. By attacking prisons, ISI enabled the escape of more than 500 prisoners from Abu Ghraib prison and more than 100 from Tikrit’s Tasfirit prison, in addition to a number of smaller prison breaks elsewhere.\footnote{"Masdar yu’akkid hurūb 600 najīl min sijn abū ghrayb baynahum akhṭar al-ihābiīn ("Source confirms the escape of 600 prisoners from Abu Ghraib prison, among them dangerous terrorists")," Almada Press, 22 July 2013; Aki Peritz, "The Great Iraqi Jail Break," 26 June 2014.} The group’s “Soldiers’ Harvest” campaign that kicked off in July 2013 demonstrated the group’s military and organizational capacity as it launched
waves of coordinated suicide attacks throughout Iraq. The main targets for these attacks were Iraqi security forces, including ISF targets in Mosul. In Mosul, the provincial elections in June 2013 were marred by repeated attacks on political events and leaders. Seven candidates for the provincial council in Ninawa were killed in targeted assassinations in the run-up to the election,119 which was postponed two months for security concerns and ended up attracting only half the number of voters as the 2009 election. ISI also targeted leaders of the protest movement against the Maliki government, indicating that the group was trying to disrupt any rapprochement between the protesters and the government and to delegitimize the democratic process. The campaign that started in 2013 culminated in June 2014 with IS seizing Mosul without major military resistance from ISF, freeing 3,000 prisoners in the city and overrunning key military installations.

Within a few days after IS entered the city, Iraqi security forces fled. Among the officers and soldiers who did not leave, many became victims of IS’s merciless extermination campaigns. Any suspected affiliation with the central government’s security or police apparatus usually amounted to a death sentence. The ease with which a few hundred120 IS soldiers could invade and seize control over a city of 1.2 million inhabitants attests to the fragility of the central government’s command over this part of the country. It also demonstrates the government’s consistent understaffing of the security forces deployed in Ninawa to protect the population, which, in the eyes of many of my informants, proved that Sunni lives were dispensable to the government. For many inhabitants of the city, it served to confirm a popular notion that Mosul is somehow an outcast among Iraqi cities despite being a major economic and demographic hub.

The harassment experienced by many Maslawis at the hands of government forces, and intra-city roadblocks and curfews restricting everyday life were factors that further contributed to alienating the predominantly Sunni population. This created a certain receptiveness for alternative rulers which IS exploited to the fullest in June 2014. Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly underline how state abuse or alienation of civilians often turns locals into rebel supporters: “In several countries, state violence – particularly counter-insurgent operations that involved large-scale victimization of the civilian population – enhanced support for rebel governments, as did the failure of state governments to attend local residents’ basic need for security and

119 “Another Iraq candidate killed ahead of provincial polls,” The Daily Star Lebanon, 14 June 2013.
120 Reports of the number of fighters involved in the operation vary from a few hundred to around 1,000.
material well-being.” Indeed, IS’s capture of Mosul, wrestling the monopoly on the use of force from the central government in a matter of days, demonstrated the hollowness of the government’s claim to protect its own population.

121 Arjona et al., Rebel Governance in Civil War, 7.
Discussion of central concepts
Ideology and pragmatism

As with most rebel groups, ideology and pragmatism are deeply interwoven in the IS political project. The footprints of its ideology are clear in many IS actions, both on the battlefield and in its governance efforts. At the same time, on many occasions IS leaders have seemingly set aside its proclaimed ideology when practical concerns demand it. The interplay between ideology and pragmatism is important in order to understand how IS’s governance of Mosul developed. In this section, I will give a brief overview of the main tenets in IS’s ideology before discussing the interaction between this ideology and pragmatic concerns.

IS’s ideology builds on so-called jihadi-Salafism, with roots in 18th century literalist interpretations of Islam, primarily Wahhabism and 20th century Islamist movements. Jihadi-Salafism developed into a violent and politicized version during the Afghanistan war in the 1980s. The IS literalist view on religious texts, the definition of a Muslim, and the contempt for foreign cultural influences are very similar to that of Wahhabism. IS’s conclusions and political project, however, are very different from those of most Wahhabi scholars, many of whom see Saudi Arabia as a legitimate Islamic state. It must also be seen separately from the general Salafi current, which in itself is more akin to a theological or doctrinal trend and does not say much about political preferences. Jihadi-Salafism is a relatively new term for extremist Salafi-inspired groups with an anti-Western and international outlook. There is no unanimous ideological agreement among groups that have been called or called themselves jihadi-Salafi, and the limits for who falls under the term is unclear. In this dissertation, the use of jihadi-Salafi or jihadi implies IS’s understanding of the terms. IS’s brand of jihadi-Salafism calls for the annihilation of all enemies of the true believers, with theoretical opportunities for repentance for certain groups. It opens the way for extermination of both non-Muslim groups and other Muslim sects. Central concepts in the group’s universe are tawḥīd, takfīr, and hijra. Tawḥīd in Salafi doctrine means not only monotheism, but also the absence of any pluralism or innovation within Islam. Takfīr, declaring someone an unbeliever, is used to divide IS’s world into the kuffār and the righteous Muslims. IS’s extensive use of the terms takfīr and kāfir stands out among jihadi-Salafi groups. IS also widely uses the term rawāfid (rejectionists) for Shia Muslims, mushrikūn for Yezidis and others it considers polytheists,

and ṭawāghīṭ (tyrants) for “nonbelieving” regimes. IS defines hijra as the migration every Muslim living outside of the “caliphate” is obligated to make to the territory controlled by IS. IS’s professed puritanism goes beyond religion and bans any cultural or political influence from the outside of the “caliphate”. To use Joana Westphal’s application of framing theory to IS, IS’s collective action frame identifies a problem (the war on true Islam) and assigns responsibility for the problem to another actor (the unbelievers). It then presents a solution to the problem (the establishment of a caliphate), and calls for action (migration to IS territory and jihād, understood as violent struggle against the unbelievers). By appropriating and redefining these normal Islamic concepts for its own use, IS links its ideology with the local context in order to rally support. IS presented its project as a break with the nation-state, and encouraged its fighters to burn their passports. It shunned the word muwāṭīn, the word for “citizen” in Arabic derived from the same root as waṭan, nation-state. However, words carrying some of the same meaning are used by the group interchangeably when addressing the locals: al-raʿāya (subjects), al-nās (the people), al-umma al-islamiyya (community of Muslims), among others. And while IS banned any reference to Iraq or Syria, it appropriated many of the symbols and routines associated with modern nation-states, such as a flag, a currency, an unofficial “national hymn”, and a bureaucracy with seemingly meticulous documentation of everything from marriage to traffic violations.

Considering IS’s opposition to the territorial nation-state, its own focus on holding territory is perhaps puzzling. In my view, a combination of ideological, military and pragmatic factors explain why territory is so central for IS compared to many other rebel groups. The idea of liberating territory and establishing an administration is far from new among jihadi groups. As Brynjjar Lia has established, “attempts to form proto-states have been a constant feature of contemporary jihadism over the past 25 years”, with an upsurge after the Arab Spring of 2011. In fact, projecting an image of state-building is so important to some jihadist groups that they claim to be governing areas that they only sporadically control. One example is the “Caucasus emirate” formed in 2007. While some groups have claimed to establish imārāt (emirates), and others have seen territorial control as a distant future goal, IS was determined

126 Lia, “Understanding Jihadi Proto-States.”

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to use the term *dawla* or *khilāfa*. The word *dawla* has an ambiguous meaning in Arabic and alludes both to the modern nation-state and to early Islamic empires like the Ummayad caliphate (*al-dawla al-ummawiyya*) and the Abbasid caliphate (*al-dawla al-ʿabbāsiyya*). IS’s spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani proclaimed in a 2014 speech that the establishment of a state was a religious duty because they were in the position to do so: “We announced it because – by Allah’s grace – we have its essentials. By Allah’s permission, we are capable of establishing the *khilāfa*. So we carry out the order of Allah (the Exalted) […].”

William McCants has placed great emphasis on IS’s idea of the apocalypse to explain IS’s obsession with territory. In the view of Zarqawi and his successors, the sectarian war that had engulfed Iraq, in which “Christians and Jews” allegedly had united with the Shia to fight the Sunnis, was a sign that the end times were approaching. Establishing a caliphate on the ground was necessary to usher in the final battle and the return of an Islamic empire. There is no doubt that this ideological peculiarity has played a role in guiding IS’s priorities. However, here it is difficult to distinguish between ideology and strategy, a point that McCants also makes. The declaration and broadcasting of its state and the realization of that state were mutually reinforcing. By creating a public image of having a functioning state in Iraq and Syria, the group attracted more foreign recruits to fill its ranks with fighters and its nascent institutions with jihadi bureaucrats. In his call for all Muslims to swear allegiance to the new caliph, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani proclaimed: “If your leaders whisper to you claiming it is not a *khilāfa*, then remember how long they whispered to you claiming that it was not a state but rather a fictional cardboard entity, until its certain news reached you. It is a state. Its news will continue to reach you showing that it is a *khilāfa*, even after time”.

Control of territory facilitates the flow of goods, weapons and people, and control over oil fields and other resources made it financially possible to substantiate the claim to statehood. When IS’s forerunners did not spend more than a small fraction of their budgets on institution building and providing social services, this was partly because they had not been economically capable of doing so. An additional factor that probably affected the timing of

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127 Audio message by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, June 2014, “ḥādhā waʿd allah” (“This is God’s Promise”), https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5mmad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the-promise-of-god22.mp3


129 Audio message by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, June 2014, “ḥādhā waʿd allah” (“This is God’s Promise”), https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5mmad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the-promise-of-god22.mp3

the caliphate declaration was rivalry with other jihadi groups.\textsuperscript{131} Claiming to have fulfilled the goal that other jihadi organizations had worked towards for decades gave IS an immediate competitive advantage. IS declared all other “Islamic states” and “emirates” null and void. Iraq and Syria were presented as merely the starting point of a caliphate encompassing the entire world. Shapiro and Hansen-Lewis concluded in their 2015 analysis of the IS economy that the group’s institutions were “inimical to economic growth”\textsuperscript{132} and not sustainable. Al-Tamimi, in his account of the various ministries taking shape under IS, countered this and predicted that the group’s professionalism could indeed make its administration sustainable if it maintained control of its strongholds.\textsuperscript{133} Andrew F. March and Mara Revkin in 2015 aired the possibility that the Islamic State could become an increasingly “normal” state over time, with bureaucratic administration and positive law, based not only on a reading of early Islamic texts but also on a “long-standing theory of statecraft and legal authority”.\textsuperscript{134}

In hindsight, the most pessimistic predictions about IS’s capacity proved to be true, but the group did manage to keep a continuous territory for longer than most other jihadi rebel groups have done in the past. Jihadist rebel groups have been portrayed as more ideologically rigid than other rebels, and less likely to sacrifice ideology for pragmatism to advance their state-building.\textsuperscript{135} In Nelly Lahoud’s analysis, jihadist groups’ religious rigidity, their relentless focus on takfīr, their individualism and lacking respect for authorities and strategic alliances have so far locked them on a nearly unavoidable “path to self-destruction”.\textsuperscript{136} The findings presented in my articles offer a more nuanced view of jihadis as ideological hard-liners who sacrifice strategic concerns. The article on healthcare shows that the efficiency of vital institutions like hospitals was undermined by ideological micromanagement, to the detriment of not only civilians, but also IS members. The article on education shows how the group started out with an ambitious plan to ideologically indoctrinate the entire population. Confronted with local resistance and the everyday prioritization of resources, the group shelved this plan. The article on policing reveals a highly pragmatic use of rules and regulations. Zachariah Mampilly notes that “[m]ore often than not, the proclaimed values of an insurgent command fail to harmonize with its actual treatment of civilians on the

\textsuperscript{131} Tønnessen, "The Group that wanted to be a State: The ‘Rebel Governance’ of the Islamic State,” 60.
\textsuperscript{132} Jacob N. Shapiro, "A predictable failure: The political economy of the decline of the Islamic State," \textit{CTC Sentinel} 9, no. 9 (2016): 28., Hansen-Lewis and Shapiro, "Understanding the Daesh Economy."
\textsuperscript{133} Al-Tamimi, "The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence," 118.
\textsuperscript{134} Andrew F. March and Mara Revkin, "Caliphate of Law," \textit{Foreign Affairs}, 15 April 2015.
\textsuperscript{135} Lia, “Understanding Jihadi Proto-States,” 38.
\textsuperscript{136} Lahoud, \textit{The Jihadi’s Path to Self-destruction}, 1-26.
The discrepancies between IS’s official ideology and its behavior towards civilians were not lost on my interviewees. On the contrary, the group’s bending and breaking of its own rules throughout its reign was one of the most common criticisms against it. Furthermore, IS adjusted fundamental tenets in its official ideology to fit realities on the ground. For instance, the Syrian town of Dabiq long played a central role in the group’s narrative of the apocalypse. IS claimed that the final battle between the “crusaders” and the “true believers” would take place in the town and named its English language propaganda magazine after it. In 2016, however, as Turkish-backed forces closed in on the town, the group launched a new magazine named Rumiya. IS lost control of Dabiq in October 2016.

Adjusting ideology to practical concerns could also be about financial convenience, as when the group allegedly sold oil to several of its declared arch enemies, such as Syria and Turkey. IS’s “fatwa” justifying sex slavery of Yezidi girls and the justification of burning a Jordanian pilot to death are other examples. While IS professes to be against any innovation in Islam, there is no doubt that its specific variety of jihadism is full of innovations when it comes to interpretation of existing Islamic sources.

As Daniel Byman has rightly noted, it is difficult to determine “when ideas truly matter and when they are meant to hide deeper goals”. Added to this comes the risk of seeing the group as one monolithic entity in which all the members have the same motivation and end goal, valuing ideology and pragmatism in exactly the same measures. This is clearly not the case, especially in an organization whose members are from a wide variety of backgrounds and countries as diverse as Belgium, Saudi-Arabia, Uzbekistan and China. The tendency to portray a military enemy as homogeneous and monolithic is not only common in the description of extremist Islamist groups targeted in the West’s “war on terror”, it is a common feature of any violent conflict. While it may facilitate mobilization against an enemy, it

137 Mampilly, Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War, 13.
139 Ahmed S. Yayla and Colin P. Clarke, "Turkey’s Double ISIS Standard," Foreign Policy, 12 April 2018.
obscures more than it enhances our understanding of a group. Further complicating the picture is the fact that there is not necessarily a causal link between certain (extremist) beliefs and violent behavior on an individual level. Most individuals with extremist views never turn their ideas into violent acts. Likewise, terrorists committing violent acts are not necessarily or primarily motivated by their extremist beliefs.\footnote{Bart Schuurman and Max Taylor, "Reconsidering Radicalization: Fanaticism and the Link Between Ideas and Violence," \textit{Perspectives on Terrorism} 12, no. 1 (2018): 15.} Thus, while the official ideology is not sufficient to explain all of the group’s actions, it is necessary in order to understand many of those actions, and it is crucial to understanding the appeal of its propaganda and the effectiveness of its recruitment machinery.

It was more than its hold on territory and governance efforts that would give IS a competitive advantage. A state’s authority needs to be constantly constructed and reconstructed by narratives that justify the state’s exercise of power, and this happens through language and communication. In a Foucauldian understanding of power, “the state justifies its exercise of power through the development of institutions and the production of knowledge about a particular territory and the people residing within its constructed borders.”\footnote{Nadia Al-Dayel and Aaron Anfinson, "‘In the Words of the Enemy’: the Islamic State’s reflexive projection of statehood," \textit{Critical Studies on Terrorism} 11, no. 1 (2018): 46.} IS’s ability to broadcast its project in a way that exploited the dynamics of Western mass media, completely overshadowed the more amateurish propaganda of other, competing jihadi groups, most of which had focused on military activities and criticizing the status quo. IS’s media strategy\footnote{For an outline of the structure of IS’s media bureaus and its general media strategy, see The Islamic State, “haykalîyyat al-maktab al-ʾilāmi” (“The structure of the media office”), Combatting Terrorism Center, West Point, 
\url{https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/08/General-Guidance-and-Instructions-Arabic.pdf}} made it the most widely covered jihadi organization in history, and this strategy, combined with spectacular terrorist attacks in the West, is much of the reason why Western media has framed IS as an existential threat.\footnote{Benjamin K. Smith et al., "Framing Daesh: Failures and Consequences," \textit{Perspectives on Terrorism} 10, no. 4 (2016): 50.} To use Charlie Winter’s classification, IS propaganda combined warfare with Sunni Muslim victimization and description of a full-fledged society in the “caliphate”.\footnote{Winter, Charlie. "Apocalypse, Later: A Longitudinal Study of the Islamic State Brand." \textit{Critical Studies in Media Communication} 35, no. 1 (2018): 103-21} In his study of IS propaganda output during one month in 2015, 53 percent of the IS media output was about IS’s utopian state, including governance, social life, religious life, justice, economics, and nature.\footnote{Winter, "Apocalypse, later: a longitudinal study of the Islamic State brand," 112.} Despite its early military successes and the
avalanche of media coverage from 2014 onwards, by the end of 2016 the Islamic State had lost a third of its territory and almost half of Mosul. From 2015 to 2017, its media production dropped by a half, with the exception of a spike in media production by the Ninawa Province Media Office during the Iraqi government’s military campaign to recapture Mosul.¹⁴⁹

The move from what Stig Jarle Hansen terms a “semiterritorial presence” to a relatively permanent presence has advantages,¹⁵⁰ as mentioned above. However, relatively permanent institutions are also more vulnerable to attack than clandestine networks, which became clear in the near-devastation of Mosul’s education and health sectors during the coalition’s retake of the city from IS. This is both because the targets are clearer, at least if one disregards their mixed civilian-military nature, and because permanent territorial presence pushes larger and superior forces to intervene as the geopolitical stakes become higher. When IS’s territorial hold dwindled, the propaganda focus shifted away from governance and more towards warfare. This is not surprising; it is difficult to make propaganda about territory and governance without controlling the territory, and important IS media centers and media leaders were hit in airstrikes. Still, it is yet another sign of how ideology and pragmatism are interwoven. The expansion of the “caliphate” had built-in limits from the beginning, land-locked as it was by the American-supported Kurdish government to the East, an interventionist Turkey to the North, Iraqi government forces to the South, and the Russian-supported Syrian regime to the West. After IS was decimated as a territorial power, its propaganda no longer emphasizes the importance of territory, but instead focused on its global agenda. As Nelly Lahoud noted, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi even insisted in a September 2017 public statement that the group’s loss of territory in Syria was in fact a blessing, and that its patience and steadfastness had spread fear among the “infidel nations”.¹⁵¹

State-building and legitimacy

IS’s political project is replete with contradictions not only in its view on territory. First, the group’s official aims are both constructive and destructive: The group wishes to construct a state on Earth in the service of the umma and God, but at the same time, it seeks to usher on the end of the world. Second, its ideology is, on the one hand, deeply individualistic. Because the jihadi see themselves as fighting a defensive war, they perceive jihad as fard al-‘ayn, an individual duty for every capable Muslim, irrespective of nationality or place of residence.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 108.
This means that each individual has the right to act on his or her own, and defy or topple authorities when deemed necessary. On the other hand, the benefit of the Muslim community, *al-*umma, is the justification for many of its actions, including its state-building. Third, in many ways, IS’s ideology calls for the revolt against existing authorities. The group has dismantled the existing power structures in the areas it has taken over, and wrestled the authority from both political elites and tribal leaders. Many of the IS members who dominated Mosul came from the peripheries, which in the eyes of many of my informants constituted a “revenge” by the marginalized countryside on the urban centers. Age no longer was an authority marker as adolescent IS fighters threatened elderly men and women at gunpoint and tribal elderly were forced to cooperate or flee. At the same time, the new structures put in place by the organization were utterly authoritarian, and the population did not have the right to choose their leaders. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself claimed some of the authority markers of existing religious elites such as a direct lineage from the Prophet Muhammad. He was introduced by IS’s spokesman in 2014 as no less than the “mujahid, the scholar who practices what he preaches, the worshipper, the leader, the warrior, the reviver, descendent from the family of the Prophet, the slave of Allah, Ibrahim bin Awwad bin Ibrahim bin Ali bin Muhammad al-Badri al-Hashimi al-Husayni al-Qurashi by lineage, al-Samarri by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdadi by residence and scholarship”.

The contradictions in IS’s project become apparent in different ways in the articles of this dissertation. By attempting to govern Mosul, IS took on its most demanding task so far. As Nelly Lahoud writes: “Whereas voters make the choice to leave the burden of governing to others, the jihadis have taken it upon themselves to shoulder the burden of governing according to God’s law. The jihadis therefore see themselves as the executives and the judiciary implementing God’s legislature”. Research shows that combatants often abstain from establishing institutions in communities with already existing high-quality institutions, instead opting for rule through local actors. IS decided instead to take full control over relatively well-functioning institutions in Mosul, despite the risk that it entails of encountering more local resistance. As Arjona shows in her research on Colombia, rebels may be willing to

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153 Audio message by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, July 2014, “hādhā wa’d allah” (“This is God’s Promise”),  https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the-promise-of-god22.mp3


take this risk when the territory has high strategic value.\textsuperscript{156} Mosul was an important strategic asset for IS in building its “caliphate” because of the city’s geographic location and because of its demography. The large population provided a tax base for IS and the city became an important financial center for the group. Rebels build or take over institutions because they realize the benefits of constraining their own behavior – at least on paper – within the frameworks of rule-bound institutions, in order to achieve greater benefits in the future.\textsuperscript{157} For civilians, institutions mean – at least in theory – better protection from indiscriminate violence by the rebels and by other civilians, and some level of predictability, order, and services. IS often emphasized the complexity and professionalism of its bureaucracy in propaganda material. For instance, in a 2016 video, the tasks of the 35 wilāyāt (provinces) and 14 dawāwīn (ministries) were outlined.\textsuperscript{158} A video from 2015, which details the zakat system, religious taxation, leaves an impression of a clear and streamlined system for collection and distribution of the tax.\textsuperscript{159} Yet another video from 2016 claims that zakat was imposed to meet the needs of “the poor and needy, in accordance with the structured work mechanism and guidelines put in place for this”.\textsuperscript{160} IS also emphasized the importance of documenting the workings of its institutions. For instance, a video report on al-ḥisba explains that “one of the ḥisba’s priorities is a documentation of the cases in order to know and understand the workflow and reach the desired results, solve issues and find suitable solutions.”\textsuperscript{161} Once IS established a monopoly of violence in an urban center like Mosul, it broadcast its new “social contract” or ‘aqd, in the form of “city documents” that define “the shari’a principles and Islamic regulations by which the shepherd and the flock are bound”.\textsuperscript{162} These documents are far from what we associate with a social contract in liberal democracies; the rights and freedoms of the “citizen” are extremely limited, and non-existing for certain groups (see the next section). Nevertheless, these and other documents stipulate certain rights and obligations for civilians. In broad terms, they regulate the relationship between civilians as

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 195.  
\textsuperscript{157} Weinstein, \textit{Inside Rebellion}, 168.  
\textsuperscript{158} The Islamic State, “The Structure of the Khilafa”, July 2016, \url{https://videopress.com/v/tv16QF5r}  
\textsuperscript{159} The Islamic State, “wa ātu al-zaka” (“And they offered the zakat”), 17 June 2015, \url{https://jihadology.net/2015/06/17/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-and-they-gave-zakah/}  
\textsuperscript{160} The Islamic State, “The Structure of the Khilafa”, July 2016, \url{https://videopress.com/v/tv16QF5r}  
\textsuperscript{162} In addition to Mosul, city documents have also been issued for Tikrit, Hit, Raqqa in Syria and Sirte in Libya, with small variations. City documents were distributed in the streets and online.
well as the relationship between civilians and the “state”. In exchange for paying taxes and obeying IS laws, civilians were promised justice, security and basic public services. The city documents also stated that IS members and leaders will be held accountable for their actions, but few details on how this would be done in practice. The city documents are written in general terms and do not provide concrete guidelines for how institutions under IS would work in practice, but guidelines are described in some detail in various IS sources, as will be shown in the articles. Setting up courts and police force were the first priority, while IS’s control over functions like healthcare and education was established gradually during the first year.

By stipulating rights and duties in city documents and laws, seemingly regulated by a meticulous bureaucracy, IS sought to make its claim to authority appear legitimate both to the outside world and the civilian population. Pure coercion is a costly way to rule for any political actor, including rebel groups, and likely to undermine the group in the long run because of declining support. As mentioned in the article on policing, the use of the term “legitimacy” here does not imply a clear boundary between legitimate and non-legitimate regimes, or that legitimacy is achieved by fulfilling a number of normative criteria. Instead of seeing legitimacy as a normative end-goal, it can be seen as a process: “an action or series of actions speeches, writing, ritual, display – whereby people justify to themselves or others the actions they are taking and the identities they are expressing or claiming”. IS sought to create both what can be called instrumental legitimacy, based on the effectiveness of service delivery, and substantial legitimacy, based on shared values. Legitimation involves not only a rational calculating of interests but also belief systems and cultural norms. The distinction between instrumental and substantial legitimacy is not clear-cut, and the article on policing shows how different types of legitimacy are intermixed in people’s perceptions of the rule. Delivering basic services like electricity and water was an important part of the group’s policy from the beginning of its takeover in Mosul. While at first glance, service delivery seems to be purely to the benefit of civilians, it can often be guided by a group’s self-interest. When IS took control over Mosul, many public services were in a

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163 Isabelle Duyvesteyn, “Rebels & Legitimacy; An Introduction ” Small Wars & Insurgencies 28, no. 4-5 (2017): 673.
165 I borrow this distinction from Weigand, “Investigating the Role of Legitimacy in the Political Order of Conflict-torn Spaces (working paper).”
166 Duyvesteyn, “Rebels & Legitimacy; An Introduction ”. 
dismal state, and improving them was an efficient way of gaining credibility. In a forthcoming study of Maslawis’, i.e. Mosul’s inhabitants’, decisions to leave or stay in Mosul, Mara Revkin suggests that those who perceived improvements in the quality of governance, especially service provision, under IS were more likely to stay than those who perceived no change or a deterioration. Revkin recognizes, however, the range of alternative explanations: Economic resources, social and family structures, lack of information, the dangers of leaving, and perception of IS’s ideology. For the large majority of my interviews, the cost-benefit calculation of fleeing was far from clear – if fleeing was an option at all. The window of opportunity before IS restricted travel was small – around seven months – and costly, leaving a large part of the population without a real choice. The deterioration of IS’ governance practices over time complicates the picture. Many of my interviewees emphasized the clean streets, good electricity provision and open, clean roads in the first months under IS. However, most of the interviewees who had fled in November 2016 cited the lack of the very same services among the reason for their flight. As IS increasingly failed in the delivery of even these basic services, its delivery of some of the more complex public services, like healthcare or education which involved large numbers of employees, amounted to a disaster.

IS attempted to move beyond instrumental legitimacy, and drew on a broad symbolic repertoire to create substantial legitimacy. IS’s emphasis on the school system, spending resources on developing a fully-fledged new curriculum, underlines this. As seen in the article on education, each schoolbook contained an introductory note explicitly justifying the Islamic State and its worldview. The dīwān for education was responsible for “propelling the wheel of knowledge” and “regulate curriculums and courses”. It is not uncommon in scholarly literature to equate IS’s idealized projection of its state with totalitarianism. As the term is usually understood, totalitarianism differs from authoritarian regimes because it does not content itself with suppressing opposition and controlling people’s behavior; it seeks to control a population’s ideas and reshape its citizens in line with the ideology of the ruling

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168 Ibid.
169 As will be shown in the article on the IS health system, many doctors were among the first wave of refugees, presumably because they had more resources at their disposal than the average Maslawi. However, some decided to stay for the same reason; they were worried that their valuable property in Mosul would be confiscated by IS if they left.
170 The Islamic State, “The Structure of the Khilafa”, July 2016, https://videopress.com/v/tyv16Qf5r
elite. Although the term “totalitarianism” is contested as a useful analytical concept, IS’s blueprint for a state did have some of these traits. The group sought to intervene broadly in most or all aspects of civilian affairs in the areas that they captured, deny any existence of a civil society and dissolve the boundaries between public and private spaces.

There are many signs that the group’s ambitions to run a wide array of institutions were greater than its ability to implement its plans on the ground in a sustainable and streamlined way across its territories. A reservoir of spoils from war should not be equated with a sound and sustainable financial system. Furthermore, an investigation based on satellite data concluded in October 2018 that the group’s revenues from oil were far below earlier estimates. As its finances ran out and military pressure increased, IS was no longer willing or capable of projecting an image of institutions serving the population. Economic hardship for the group seems to have led it to increasingly predatory “taxation” – described by most civilians as extortion – applied in a haphazard way with large variations even within the city borders. The tax regime did not take into account that many Maslawis were left without income after IS’s occupation of the city. As described in the article on policing, the group’s claim to accountability and justice became increasingly hollow. By the end of 2015, hospitals, schools and universities resembled empty shells of previous institutions.

Civilians – a two-edged sword

As already mentioned, IS has a more narrow definition than al-Qa’ida and other jiiadist groups of the “Muslim masses” that qualify for protection. IS has systematically promoted genocide on Shia Muslims, Yezidis and certain other groups. The group also generally does not call for caution when it comes to killing civilians that pose no military threat, as al-Qa’ida has done on several occasions. Anti-Shia rhetoric and violence is not specific to IS; it is a common trait among jihadi-Salafis. As Guido Steinberg asserts, historically it has flared up at times when radical Sunni groups believed that true Islam is in danger, and that Shia are part of the threat against it. When these groups have ruthless and capable leaders, and Shia retaliate, as was the case in Iraq post-2003, conditions are optimal for major conflict to break out between militant elements of the two sects. Yezidis were seen as devil-worshippers and polytheists (mushrikūn) and either killed or enslaved by IS. On paper, Christians had a special

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174 Ibid.
status compared to other minorities and were offered the choice of converting to Islam or paying a religious protection tax, *jizya*.

This policy is in line with the general trend among jihadi-Salafi groups, in which Christians in theory are tolerated if they abide by a set of conditions, including refraining from any public worship. At the same time, almost an entire issue of IS’s magazine *Dabiq*, entitled “Break the Cross”, is devoted to discrediting the “crusaders” and the Christians, illustrated with Christian symbols.

It contains a warning: “Even if you [Westerners] were to pay jizyah and live under the authority of Islam in humiliation, we would continue to hate you. No doubt, we would stop fighting you then as we would stop fighting any disbelievers who enter into a covenant with us, but we would not stop hating you.”

In practice, many Shia and Yezidis, and some Christians, were killed without having a real option to convert or pay *jizya*. Displaced Christians that I interviewed from Qaraqosh, Iraq’s main Christian town 32 kilometers southeast of Mosul, reported that some of the men were killed immediately when IS arrived in the town, while other inhabitants were forced onto busses that drove them out of the province.

Many Christians in both Iraq and Syria were kidnapped, and later killed or released for ransom. There are also reports of Christians being enslaved by IS, although this seems to be isolated cases and not institutionalized as with Yezidi women. In reality, these ambiguous signals were enough for most Christians to flee Mosul along with Shia and Yezidis within few days, and their property was confiscated by IS.

From IS’s perspective, Christians, Yezidis and other small minorities did not represent an important popular base. More puzzling is perhaps the group’s view on Shia, who make up the majority of the population of Iraq, the land that was branded by IS as the heartland of the “caliphate”. IS’s strongholds were in Sunni-majority territory, and the group’s narrative presented IS as the defender of the Sunnis from the Shia. Nevertheless, the group’s non-forgiving hatred of Shia drew clear limits early on to its popularity outside of these areas.

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175 See ultimatum for Christians in Mosul, The Islamic State, 17 July 2014, Specimen S in AJTA, [http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents](http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents). Historically, the *jizya* was also imposed on Jews, but no Jews resided in the Iraqi areas taken over by IS.

176 As Brynjar Lia notes, in Al-Qaida’s propaganda the “crusaders” are distinct from Christians living in the Middle East. The former is construed as the main enemy, while the latter is merely seen with suspicion. Brynjar Lia, "Korsfarernes medløpere eller lydige undersåtter?", *in De Kristne i Midtøsten: kampen for tilhørighet*, ed. Berit Thorbjørnsrud (Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2015), 194.

177 The Islamic State, *Dabiq*, no. 15, July 2016, 33.

178 Interviews with four families from Qaraqosh village 32 km southeast of Mosul, conducted in Ankawa IDP camp, 1 November 2016.

With the infidels removed from the scene, IS sought to legitimize its rule to the civilians that it included in its “social contract”. Creating some level of legitimacy for its governance was not merely ideological, as it was portrayed in the city documents. It was also necessary from a security point of view, because IS members were hugely outnumbered by civilians in Mosul, the largest population ever under its rule. Resistance is intrinsic to any political order, and civilians are a two-edged sword for rebels attempting to govern. As Ana Arjona et al. put it, civilians are “an essential source of food, supplies, information, and recruits. But civilians’ ties to the incumbent regime put rebels in constant danger of betrayal.”\(^{180}\) IS did not have enough manpower to control a potential mass uprising, and my article on education indicates that IS had a real fear of sustained local resistance. That fear seems to be well grounded, as there are reported examples of open demonstrations and protests against IS in both Iraq and Syria.\(^{181}\) The public punishments and executions of those accused of treason by IS also indicate the need to avert potential resistance. According to Ana Arjona, rebel groups need a high level of obedience and a modest level of outright support to maintain control.\(^{182}\) If orders are given but people do not follow them, which is shown in the article on education, a group risks losing face and authority. In turn, this can further decrease its legitimacy and encourage more boycott.

Albert O. Hirschman has proposed the three categories *exit*, *voice* and *loyalty* to describe the choices facing, for instance, a group of individuals experiencing repression.\(^{183}\) The findings presented in the articles point to the presence of all of the above-mentioned civilian strategies: flight to areas outside of IS control, expressions of disagreement and bargaining or direct confrontation with IS rule, cooperation and direct support of IS. *Exit* in Hirschman’s typology means flight, which entails neither cooperation nor non-cooperation with the rebels. In a civil war context like Iraq, the decision to flee from a rebel-held area is often based on a combination of factors apart from disagreement with the rebels’ way of ruling: escalating violence and fear for one’s own security, deteriorating economic situation and lack of

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\(^{180}\) Arjona et al., *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, 3.


professional prospects, or direct persecution by the new rulers. The first wave of refugees, displacing several hundred thousand from Mosul, took place within the first three weeks after IS took power. After about seven months, IS banned movement out of the city, removing flight as an option for most civilians. The timing of the first exodus makes it reasonable to assume a direct connection between the arrival of IS and the choice to flee. Iraqi policemen, soldiers, local politicians and religious minorities were among the first wave of refugees out of Mosul because of the imminent threat to their lives.

Hirschman’s voice category groups together various ways in which civilians actively engage with the rebels. Civilians are not only victims or supporters of rebels; they can actively bargain with and influence these groups’ behavior. No matter how repressive a regime is, there are always avenues through which civilians can challenge it. These challenges can take the form of anything from subtle forms of “everyday resistance” and expression of disagreements and grievance, to direct confrontation with the rebels. Based on my findings, I divided the “voice” category into three – sometimes-overlapping – subcategories inspired by Shane Joshua Barter: defiance, everyday resistance and engagement. According to Barter, defiance “involves the most visible, confrontational forms of voice, such as protest and other acts intended to mobilize public opinion and challenge armed groups,” and it can take place either individually or collectively. Sometimes, defiance is carried out by individuals using self-immolation, hunger strikes or protests. At other times, defiance takes place collectively. 

There are documented examples of defiance leading to small victories in IS-controlled parts of both Iraq and Syria. In July 2014, after a prominent imam and his followers refused to pledge allegiance to IS leader al-Baghdadi, a large number of the imam’s supporters marched to the mosque where he preached to demonstrate solidarity. IS detained some of the protesters but did not kill any of the religious leaders, who had large followings. The same month, IS refrained from demolishing a Mosul mosque after residents formed a human chain around it. In July 2013, the Raqqa teacher Suad Nofel marched onto the streets alone every day for three months, protesting in front of the IS headquarters. Her handmade signs read messages such as “Don’t tell me about your religion, but show it in your behaviour!” and “No to oppression, no to unjust rulers, no to atonement, and yes to thinking!”. Reports say that IS agreed to free a number of prisoners after more citizens joined her protests. In January

186 Stephan, "Civil Resistance vs. ISIS," 136.
187 Taleb, “From Assad to ISIS, a tale of Syrian resistance”.

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2015, the Islamic State closed one of its courts in Mosul after growing local opposition to its harsh judgements.\textsuperscript{188}

These and other examples show that some individuals and groups are willing to go to great lengths and risk their own lives in order to influence how rebels govern. However, my interviews confirm that these kinds of acts are exceptions. In Mosul, IS was notorious for violently repressing any sign of defiance. The group relied on public spectacles of brutal force – executions, torture, and display of dead bodies – in order to prevent further resistance. Arjona suggests that this kind of symbolic violence can have a “freezing” effect on the spectators and help secure obedience even for a rebel group with relatively few members. “It might help to make civilians obey not only because they learn that disobedience carries serious consequences, but also because fear makes them psychologically incapable of reacting in any way but complying”.\textsuperscript{189} Conversely, the violent spectacles may lead civilians to disobey because they are outraged - an awakening effect: “People may feel the need to react, to partake in their own defence, and to look for support in others in order to endure hardship. Uniting may not only provide actual protection but also the sense of responding to injustice; it may help to build a sense of self-ownership, of belonging, and of self-worth.”\textsuperscript{190} From my interviews, it is clear that IS’s violent spectacles in the streets and squares of Mosul could have both a freezing and an awakening effect on civilians, depending on the person. Some teachers recounted how the experience of watching rebellious colleagues being executed by IS was a reason why they decided to more actively resist IS rule. Others used these spectacles as an explanation for the opposite, why they chose not to openly defy IS – it was simply too dangerous.

Many opted instead for one of the most frequently recorded types of resistance among my interviewees, engagement or everyday resistance. Engagement includes less confrontational feedback or covert attempts to negotiate with IS. For example, the article on healthcare shows how some doctors tried to talk to IS members to try to influence the policy of prioritizing IS members over civilian patients. Everyday resistance is quiet subversion of the rule without direct confrontation. Charles Tripp has described different acts that can constitute everyday resistance: “Whether this happens in the sphere of property (through pilfering, quiet encroachment and alternative economies) or of education (through alternative forms that

\textsuperscript{188} Revkin, “Does the Islamic State Have a “Social Contract”? Evidence from Iraq and Syria,” 27.


\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 766.
escape the dictation of the state) or of culture, broadly defined (through reaffirmation of values that resist the mainstream), all these activities can feed into a politics of resistance.”

The article on education describes how many teachers resisted IS’s education plan by avoiding to show up in the classroom, but complying when they were directly confronted by IS. This sort of “foot-dragging” is a form of everyday resistance. Some teachers gave secret private lessons in their homes, while some Mosul doctors treated civilians in their homes when they were denied treatment by IS. The articles also show how some Maslawis used their expertise within a field to quietly subvert IS by holding back information or giving vague answers, and in that way hollowing out the effect of IS’s policies. As Tripp notes, the actions described here do not necessarily lead to—or may not even be intended to lead to—overturning the order of power. However, they may prepare the ground for a more public and active resistance.

The last of Hirschman’s categories, loyalty, is difficult to measure in an authoritarian context like Mosul under IS. The question of how many Maslawis actively supported IS is complicated because people’s public behavior was strictly regulated, and because of the risk of bias described in the methodology section of this dissertation. Many reports show that IS’s rule over Mosul was characterized by a “soft” introduction, in which the group promised to free the inhabitants of the repressive Iraqi government. IS introduced the details of their penal code gradually during the first months. When introduced, the punishments for violating IS’s version of shari’a were deemed extreme by the population, especially in the urban center. Nevertheless, many of my informants spoke in positive terms of the first period of IS rule. “Everyone welcomed IS in the beginning” was a phrase that recurred in most of my interviews. This was explained by IS’s lifting of the roadblocks in the city and its promises of better public services. In the first “honeymoon” months directly following June 2014, there were media reports in which some civilians praised IS for delivering on these promises. Research shows that civilians are often more receptive to rebels when they suffer at the hand of the incumbent regime. For instance, in his comparison of rebellions in five Latin American countries Nelson Kasfir found that “insurgent governance was more robust where the state ignored or alienated civilians and more feeble where the state or political parties secured.

191 Tripp, The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East, 10.
193 Tripp, The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East, 10.
peace, introduced democratic reforms, and improved living conditions.\textsuperscript{195} However, the interviews conducted for this study show that Mosul’s positive reception did not last for more than a few months, which is in line with other research.\textsuperscript{196} Initial improvements in services did not last long, and the Maslawis who stayed in the city during IS’s reign soon experienced a far greater restriction on movement than under the Iraqi regime. From November or December 2014, a permit from IS was needed to travel outside of Mosul and was only granted in certain cases, such as for medical treatment. By early 2015, most travel outside of the city was banned. In May, the group issued a warning to medical personnel to return to the city or have their property confiscated,\textsuperscript{197} and those who had fled the city were denounced as infidels. Attempts to flee the city were often punished. As the article on policing shows, the group’s violence towards locals became more indiscriminate and unpredictable over time. None of my informants, both refugees and people still residing in Mosul, reported any sympathy for IS or its governance at the time they were interviewed in 2016 and 2017.\textsuperscript{198}

According to Stathis Kalyvas, rebels tend to use indiscriminate violence in situations where they lack information and resources,\textsuperscript{199} which was the case for IS in their attempt to rule a population that greatly outnumbered them. Mampilly argues that rebels must resist the temptation to use indiscriminate violence if they hope to rally civilians behind their cause.\textsuperscript{200} A similar conclusion is drawn by Fransisco Gutiérrez-Sanín in his study of Colombia; when the militias’ violence became less predictable and started preying on the community, they lost their authority to govern.\textsuperscript{201} In Mosul, the general public support seems to have dropped dramatically after an initial period of tentative support, as a reaction to what the locals saw as excessive, unpredictable and unjust violence.

However, it is important not to downplay the fact that many of Mosul’s inhabitants actively and publicly supported IS by pledging a civilian or military allegiance to the group. It would

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\textsuperscript{195} Kasfir, "Rebel Governance - Constructing a Field of Inquiry," 42.
\textsuperscript{197} The Islamic State, announcement, Ninawa, May 2015, Specimen SI in AJTA: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents
\textsuperscript{198} As mentioned in the methodology section, there is a risk of an anti-IS bias among the informants. Nevertheless, the openness about their initial support for the practicalities of IS governance suggests that informants did not fear negative reactions from talking freely about the group’s governance style. None, however, spoke in positive terms about IS’s ideology.
\textsuperscript{199} Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 149.
\textsuperscript{200} Mampilly, Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War, 50.
\end{flushleft}
have been impossible for the group to retain control over the city for nearly three years without the explicit support of a large number of Maslawis. As the article on healthcare indicates, people’s motivation for supporting the group varied. According to some interviews, some were pressured to pledge allegiance to get access to medical treatment for a family member. However, the fact that IS found supporters in all socio-economic strata shows that the motives for supporting the group went beyond economic benefits. Furthermore, there were also risks associated with supporting the group, like the risk of social exclusion and persecution after IS’s fall.202

Methodology
Description of method

Interviews, administrative documents produced by IS, and IS propaganda material are the main sources for this study. Administrative documents are predominantly taken from trusted open online sources, in particular Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s archive of IS documents. Al-Tamimi is a Syria and Iraq researcher who continuously publishes documents gathered in former IS-controlled provinces in his open online archive, and he is arguably among the researchers who currently have the most expertise in evaluating the authenticity of IS documents. Although Al-Tamimi most often has provided high-quality translations of these documents into English, I have evaluated and translated the original in each document that I refer to. The propaganda material used in this dissertation is gathered online, often via websites like Jihadology, which post links to videos and other material that are accessible even if the original posting has been removed. In terms of propaganda, I have focused on the group’s officially recognized and most widely disseminated propaganda because I consider this the most central arena for IS to present its vision for governance, even though social media and personal messenger applications are also important vehicles for IS propaganda. The study draws on IS propaganda videos in Arabic and English, the English language IS magazines Dabiq and Rumiya, the Arabic language newsletter al-Naba’ and various textbooks in Arabic produced by the group. I supplement my analysis with reports from Arabic-, English-, French- and Scandinavian-language media and existing research, as well as public reports from national and international NGOs.

I conducted interviews for this study during two four-week research trips to northern Iraq in October-November 2016 and April-May 2018, in addition to interviews conducted via telephone and social media. My main aim was to interview both providers and users of public services under IS rule between 2014 and 2017. For my article on the education system, I interviewed teachers from primary school level to university level who had taught in schools and universities in Mosul or the surrounding villages under IS rule, as well as administrative employees in the education sector. On the “user” side, I interviewed students from Mosul University who had been enrolled under IS rule, and parents who had children of school age during this period. Similarly, for the article on the healthcare system, I interviewed doctors of various specializations and administrative health employees who had worked under IS, as well as patients and relatives of patients who had been in IS run hospitals, and managers and political representatives in the relevant areas. For the article on policing, I did additional
interviews with people in the streets of various Mosul neighborhoods. Some were interviewed on more than one of the three topics. In addition to interviewing specific professionals, I interviewed a large number of civilians selected only on the criteria that they lived in Mosul for a longer period between June 2014 and the liberation from IS in 2017. I conducted some interviews alone, but most in the presence of my Iraqi assistant. I conducted the interviews in Arabic, recorded them and translated the parts quoted in the articles. When interviewees spoke fluent English or French, the interviews were conducted in those languages. Despite my solid knowledge of Arabic, Iraq has a rich diversity of local dialects that I was not always familiar with. To ensure smooth communication with the interviewees, my assistant would often function as an interpreter during interviews and translate parts into English when necessary. As is often the case in Arabic-speaking countries, there was a clear class dimension to the use of language. Interviewees with higher education often adjusted their dialect into Modern Standard Arabic, which eased the communication. Interviewees without higher education did this to a lesser extent, which demanded more use of the interpreter.

My selection of interviewees was partly based on “snowball sampling” in which informants introduce other informants. Among my interviewees of civilians, approximately half stayed in Mosul the entire duration of IS rule over the city, whereas the other half fled at different points throughout the period. All my civilian interviewees experienced at least seven months of IS rule, and all were Sunni Muslim Arabs or Kurds. Added to this were interviews with persons who had fled in the first day or two after IS’s takeover, but who nevertheless shed light on aspects of IS governance. These include political representatives and administrative leaders from Ninawa provincial council, NGOs who received IDPs from Mosul, and Christian families from the town of Qaraqosh. Additional interviews were done by my assistant after my departure. He followed my instructions about the questions and choice of interviewees and recorded the interviews.

During the first trip, because of security issues described in the next section, I focused on interviewing internally displaced people (IDPs) within the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq (KRI): in Erbil, Duhok, and the three IDP camps Debaga, Baharka and Ankawa. Most often, camp management and NGOs running the camps were helpful in pointing me in the direction of interviewees who had spent considerable time under IS rule. For interviews on the education system under IS, I contacted IDP camp schools because some professionals tend to

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203 Representatives from Doctors without Borders, Norwegian Refugee Council, and Global Response Management.
take on the same work inside camps as they had in their place of origin. In this way, I tracked down schoolteachers, university teachers and school managers in the camps. Similarly, I contacted clinics in the camps to locate doctors from Mosul. Through contacts that I made in the camps and in Erbil, I tracked down more teachers and students, which again led me to others. By phone, I interviewed students from Mosul University who had fled Mosul and continued their studies in Kirkuk. To expand the pool of possible interviewees I went to Avro City, a neighborhood in Duhok where many relatively affluent IDPs from Mosul have settled since 2014. One pre-arranged appointment in Avro City led me to several others. In Duhok I also interviewed administrative employees who had worked in the education directorate in Mosul before IS. In Erbil I interviewed more students, and exiled political and administrative leaders from Mosul, like the director of education in Ninawa and the governor of Mosul.

At the time of my second trip, the most recently displaced people dwelled in camps outside of the KRI. Because of that, I went to Hassan Sham and Khazer IDP camps between Erbil and Mosul to conduct interviews for the articles on health and policing. When I arrived in April 2018, IS no longer held territory in Ninawa and internally displaced persons were slowly returning to their hometowns. Because the security situation allowed for trips to Mosul at this point, I made eight day-trips together with my assistant to Mosul, where I interviewed civilians and employees in the health sector who had worked there under IS rule. For interviews on civilians’ experiences with the IS police, I went to various central neighborhoods in Mosul. Building on my existing network, I was able to locate a handful of relevant interviewees who then introduced me to others. Most of these interviews were pre-arranged and conducted in people’s own homes or in private offices in their workplaces, while other appointments and interviews were made by travelling to various neighborhoods and approaching people in the streets.

For article 1, I gathered 33 interviews lasting between 30 minutes and two hours with students and employees in the education sector under IS, as well as 30 interviews with civilians lasting between 15 minutes and one hour. For article 2, I gathered 15 in-depth interviews with medical staff lasting between 1.5 and 3 hours each, in addition to 23 interviews with civilians. Article 3 is based on 39 interviews with civilians. When relevant, civilians were interviewed for more than one article. The interviews for this study were a combination of semi-structured and open-ended, departing from a pre-determined set of questions but leaving room for the interviewees to bring focus to what they deemed relevant and ascribe meanings to it. This approach was necessary because my aim with the interviews was two-fold. On the one hand,
the interviews were a way to obtain a fuller description of the workings of IS administration, which required that I include certain specific questions about these structures in all interviews. On the other hand, I wanted interviewees to give their own, subjective opinion on the IS administration, and this required an open-ended approach. As Bridget Byrne phrases it, “qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions (…)”.204

My previous work experience as a journalist for more than ten years was helpful in tracking down interviewees, building trust with possible interviewees, conducting the interviews, and keeping in mind ethical challenges in the various interview settings. Because of the sensitivity of my topic, and my experience with informants cancelling interviews, I started each interview by explaining my role and the aims of my project, before asking a general, introductory question allowing for the interviewee to decide the starting point (For instance, “Can you tell me what happened the first day that IS took over your hospital?”). Firstly, my questions addressed the interviewees’ concrete observations about how IS structured their institutions and how IS members interacted with them and other civilians (Did IS change the manager in your hospital? In what ways did your workday change after their take-over? Did you report crimes to the IS police?). Secondly, the questions addressed interviewees’ personal reactions to IS’s decisions (What did you think about the policy to segregate women and men? Why did you stop going to work?). At the end of the interview, I included open questions about the topic to give the interviewee the opportunity to bring in aspects not already mentioned (Do you wish to add anything about this topic? Did any events during this time make a specific impact on you?).

Security context during fieldtrips

Security considerations and the political atmosphere at the time of my field trips meant that I did not have complete freedom in choosing my informants. I encountered different sets of practical obstacles on my two trips to Iraq because the context drastically changed from 2016 to 2018. During both of my research trips, I was based in Erbil in the KRI. At the time of my first research trip, the Islamic State was still controlling Ninawa province, protecting the borders of its territory only 65 kilometers from Erbil. On October 16, 2016, the international

coalition launched its long-awaited military campaign to expel IS from Iraq. For security reasons, and because a battlefield is not an ideal place for qualitative research, I did not enter Mosul during my first stay, but did interviews within the KRI. The military campaign led to heightened security measures because of the increased chance of IS suicide attacks inside the Kurdish region, but this had little negative impact on my work within the KRI.

More importantly, the military campaign resulted in an explosion in the number of internally displaced people from Mosul and the surrounding villages to camps in the Kurdish region. The arrival of IDPs in KRI presented an opportunity to do research interviews among people who had recently fled from Mosul and had experienced up to two and a half years of IS rule. Because of visa limitations, I was not able to stay in Iraq at the peak of the IDP stream during spring 2017 when civilians from Mosul city started entering the camps in large numbers.

The main challenge during my first trip was to locate internally displaced people from Mosul city who had lived for a period under IS rule in the city. At this point, with several thousand IDPs arriving every day from the whole region, the conditions were chaotic in the camps. At the same time, the KRI was a refuge for people of all socio-economic backgrounds, and nearly all Iraqi districts that had been under IS control were represented there. Using the approach described above, I managed to interview civilians with a range of professional backgrounds from a variety of neighborhoods in Mosul as well as rural areas outside the city. I had the freedom to choose my own interviewees within the camps.

My second research trip was delayed until April-May 2018 because of the political turbulence and airport closure in Erbil following the referendum on Kurdish autonomy in November 2017. Punitive measures by the central government led to changes in the visa regime, and I spent four months waiting to obtain the necessary Iraqi visa. The delay of my second trip left only six months between my return and the end of my project. However, it also presented a welcome opportunity to go to Mosul because the security situation in the city by that time had improved. With this opportunity came a new range of obstacles compared to working in the camps.

The security situation in central Mosul in April-May 2018 was relatively good; the Iraqi army and its affiliated militias had re-established their presence and checkpoints were controlling the entrance of each neighborhood. However, raids to arrest suspected IS supporters still happened regularly in the city, and several suicide attempts by IS sleeper cells had been foiled in the months following liberation. Both physically and socially, the city bore scars of IS rule and the military campaign to expel it. Large parts of west Mosul were in rubble after intense
air bombardment by the coalition against IS, and many of its inhabitants were still lingering in camps. IS’s divisive rule had disturbed the general sense of trust among inhabitants of Mosul, which had been one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse cities in Iraq before IS’s genocidal policies against certain groups. After the liberation of Mosul, many Maslawis that I interviewed felt collectively accused by Iraqi security forces of having supported IS. At the same time, in their view they had been betrayed by Iraqi forces who had left the city in IS hands. Maslawis’ general distrust of the the central government has deep roots, but it was undoubtedly deepened by IS occupation of Mosul. This was expressed in a general wariness about being interviewed about IS-related issues, especially among certain groups. While internally displaced persons in the relative safety of the Kurdish region had shown a great willingness to be interviewed, those still residing in Mosul were more skeptical. So-called snowball sampling had proven very efficient during my 2016 trip. In Mosul, the introductions to new sources were slower. This was especially the case when gathering interviews for Article 2, because many doctors worked in close proximity with IS members and directly followed IS orders within the hospitals. A majority of the doctors I contacted declined to be interviewed. Moreover, some of the doctors who initially agreed to an interview later cancelled or cut the meeting short. In an attempt to find new avenues for possible interviewees, I visited several hospitals and contacted hospital managers and the Ninawa doctors’ syndicate. However, this approach most often turned out to be a dead end, as doctors were even more skeptical about being interviewed in their workplace and the doctors’ syndicate declined to put me in contact with doctors who had worked under IS. Hospital managers were equally unhelpful in introducing me to possible interviewees. In the few cases where a hospital manager introduced me to doctors, he would demand to be present during the interview. After the few first days in Mosul, news reached us that Mosul’s health directorate had issued new rules forbidding health personnel to talk to journalists or researchers in their workplace unless presented with a written permission from the directorate. For two days, I spent several hours in the offices of the health directorate to get the necessary permission. Even when I presented the permission from the health directorate, hospital managers would not let me interview employees freely, but only in the manager’s office. Those interviewed in hospitals or clinics, with colleagues or supervisors around, seemed to speak less freely about their experiences and avoided going into detail. On two occasions, the current managers of hospitals that had been under IS control contradicted their subordinate doctors’ accounts. While the doctors described IS interference in almost every aspect of the hospitals, managers
of the same hospitals described less contact with IS. Because they answered directly to the health directorate, hospital managers had significant personal incentives to avoid that any of the hospital staff was being associated with IS. In the end, the large majority of my interviews on healthcare were done in peoples’ own homes after making an appointment in their workplace or on the phone. In my experience, the interviews conducted in private in peoples’ own homes provided the richest and most detailed accounts. The interviews for the education article were conducted in IDP camps, cafes or teachers’ homes. The interviews for the police article were conducted in camps, cafes and homes and in the streets of Mosul.

The context described here naturally affected my freedom to spend as much time as I wanted in each location, have informal conversations and freely pick my research subjects. Nevertheless, I conducted a number of successful interviews in Mosul.

Strengths and weaknesses of method

The combination of open, closed, pre-determined and improvised questions resulted in rich accounts providing unexpected details. For example, in the case of the healthcare system, I had some general impressions of the workings of the system through sources available before my second research trip. These were confirmed by similar accounts from informants. However, most of the telling details about everyday IS rule in the hospitals were brought up by the informants themselves. When a new piece of information was mentioned, I followed it up in interviews with others. I also conducted follow-up interviews with most of the informants to solicit their feedback on my conclusions, either in person, on the phone or via social media. This strategy, sometimes called respondent validation, helps to rule out misunderstandings about informants’ accounts and their interpretations of events, as well as to identify my own biases.205 Particularly because the topic of my research is understudied, it was fruitful to approach the interview with a tentative plan, but retain flexibility. This active listening approach makes it possible to achieve “rich data”, data that are detailed and varied enough that they “provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on”.206

I strove to collect as broad a selection of interviews as possible, reflecting different socio-economic strata in Mosul and the rural areas surrounding the city. Iraq is a country with considerable internal differences in education and income levels, and for the articles on education and health, the combination of well-educated and less-educated sources gave

important insight. While doctors and teachers are in the best positions to describe the workings of the system in detail, members of the general public are important sources to describe the services from the perspectives of the parents, students, or patients, regardless of their education level.

Following the exodus of more than 800,000 civilians from Mosul after 2014, where an IDP ended up reflected his or her socio-economic status in Mosul. The majority of people in the camps were from lower socio-economic strata and often from rural areas surrounding Mosul. Some middle-class Maslawis dwelled in IDP camps for long periods because they had spent all their savings on smugglers to escape Mosul. However, they often had connections or family within the Kurdish region, which enabled them to settle in houses and start new lives. The Kurdish region has considerably higher living expenses than the rest of Iraq. The displaced persons who have settled inside cities in the Kurdish region are therefore among the wealthiest and best educated of Mosul’s population, such as politicians, academics, university teachers, and doctors. During my second trip, it soon became clear that the people still dwelling in camps in April 2018, nine months after the liberation of Mosul, were among Mosul’s least resourceful inhabitants, those who lacked the means or connections to help them restart their lives. Many were from neighborhoods in west Mosul, IS’s last stronghold, which had been completely destroyed by coalition air raids against IS. This group provided interesting insights into some aspects of IS rule. The great variation in interviewees’ education level made it necessary to adjust the interview method. Typically, those with higher education included much detail on their own initiative and presented their own analysis of events, often bringing up topics not mentioned in my questions. Those with little or no education demanded more follow-up questions for detail and clarification.

Regrettably, female interviewees are under-represented in my data for two main reasons. Firstly, IS’s regime strictly limited women’s freedom to move outside of their homes. Walking outside without a male guardian or failing to comply with the clothing rules could have severe consequences, which confined most women to their homes for most of IS’s rule. Women’s participation in working life decreased dramatically. Thus, men have more hands-on experience with the workings of IS governance practices and are able to share richer information on the topics relevant for my study. This is particularly true with regards to IS policing. Secondly, I found that men were willing to be interviewed more often than women, and willing to share more detailed information. When possible, I strove to include women
among my interviews. The over-representation of men is nevertheless an inherent weakness in my data, and women’s experiences of IS rule deserve more scrutiny in future research.

The main sources in this study – interviews, text study of IS sources, and secondary sources – all have inherent biases and sources of invalidity. Interviewees may have personal, psychological, professional and security reasons to give certain representations of the events and leave out certain other representations. Interviews are often invaluable when trying to shed light on subjective experiences and attitudes, and are a convenient way of overcoming distances in time and space. Nevertheless, even descriptions of seemingly mundane structures and events are imbued with interpretation and colored by personal experiences before, during and after the IS occupation. Interviews are “retrospective accounts that often explain and justify behavior”. It is important not to blindly accept the positivist view that interview data automatically give access to objective “facts”. They are not direct descriptions of people’s experiences, but rather indirect representations of those experiences. In post-IS Mosul, it is reasonable to expect that interviewees may seek to justify their own behavior in their retrospective accounts.

To minimize this effect, I strove to make the interview situations as comfortable and private as I could, conducting the interviews in the informants’ own homes when possible. I made it clear early on that I anonymize all informants, leaving out their name, age and workplace. Furthermore, I tried to diversify the informants’ backgrounds as much as I could within the given limitations. For example, for my article on the healthcare system I intentionally interviewed health personnel from all the main hospitals as well as smaller clinics and private practices. The main hospitals were located in various neighborhoods throughout the east and the east side of Mosul and frequented by civilians from various socio-economic backgrounds. Informants from the different locations naturally gave differing details concerning, for example, IS’s interference in a specific hospital. Although new details emerged from each interview, the descriptions of the most central aspects of the healthcare system under IS were consistent.

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207 I here use the term “validity” to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, without implying the existence of one “objective truth” to which an account can be compared, following Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach, 106.


210 Silverman, Interpreting Qualitative Data, 173.

211 Ibid., 172.
One possible validity threat is reactivity, my own influence on the research setting. Interviews are interactional, and as an interviewer, “you routinely decide which bit of talk to follow up, you routinely decide when to open and close various topics and the interaction as a whole”.212 In qualitative research, it is not the goal to eliminate the influence of the researcher, but to understand it and use it productively,213 while avoiding obvious pitfalls like leading questions. Reactivity is inevitable; what the informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation. The fact that I am a female researcher from a Western country may have affected the interview situation in several ways. At the time of my first trip, Norway was directly involved in the coalition that had destroyed many of my interviewees’ homes. This was never brought up during interviews, but it may potentially have affected the relation to interviewees. Being a woman in a conservative male-dominated society like Iraq can potentially limit both my own freedom to do interviews where and when I want, and the informants’ answers. However, in my experience, being a woman created more possibilities than obstacles, because it granted easy access to female interviewees. Because I had the opportunity to work with a local male assistant when necessary, contacting and interviewing men was not a problem.

IS propaganda sources have the obvious bias that they are created to increase recruitment, fear or public appreciation of their rule, most likely leaving out anything that will affect any of these in a negative way. As such, they are not reliable as sources for the workings of IS institutions on the ground. However, they are valuable as documents describing in detail IS’s official narrative. IS administrative documents that are meant for external distribution are also geared towards creating an image of a functioning state vis-à-vis civilians, and the line between an administrative document and propaganda is not always clear-cut. Sometimes documents indirectly show deficiencies and defects in IS rule, for example in the declarations threatening doctors who do not return to IS territory, suggesting that working conditions for doctors were not optimal in the “caliphate” and that hospitals were lacking staff. In a November 2015 declaration, IS urged students to re-register in other departments if their original department had been shut down,214 revealing the group’s deficient capacity in the university sector. However, many documents are declarations distributed among locals to justify the new rule, often written in a victorious and grandiose language and describing an

ideal situation rather than facts on the ground. IS administrative documents that are meant primarily for internal use within the organization and its bureaucracy are, in theory, more reliable in their descriptions of IS institutions. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that they are written to address fighters or IS members in time of war, and the strategic aim to boost the internal morale may obscure the image of what was actually happening on the ground.

It is important to be aware of the limitations of using online sources collected by third parties. Only a fraction of IS’s total output of administrative documents are available online, and third parties may have their own reasons for selecting of documents to be made available online. While many IS documents were destroyed by the group before retreating, many remained and are still being uncovered, and a comprehensive analysis of these documents is an important avenue for future research. The New York Times’ partnership with George Washington University to digitize and make available IS documents found by the newspaper’s journalists in Iraq is one of several efforts in this regard. The removal of these documents from Iraq has been criticized by, among others, the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). MESA has also condemned the publication of some of the documents in unredacted form, and the possibility that they will be made available to the public. In addition to the possible selection bias mentioned above, the use and publication of IS documents gathered in Iraq and Syria carry important ethical repercussions, and must under no circumstances endanger the lives of those who lived in IS-controlled areas. At the same time, such documents offer unique insight into the workings of IS’s administration and provide a window into a piece of Iraqi and Syrian history. Furthermore, they can benefit civilians and governments who try to build legal cases against IS war criminals.

One of the main aims of my study is precisely to show the discrepancy between the image created by the documents and the reality lived by civilians. Nevertheless, although civilians are the most valuable sources in my study, they too have inherent biases and their accounts cannot be taken as the last word. Triangulation of different data selection methods allows a broader and more secure understanding of the issues that are being investigated. It reduces

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215 Rukmini Callimachi, "The ISIS Files," The New York Times, April 4 2018.; "Bil-arqâm... Hadhihi al-asâr alatî dafa’aha dâ’ish limuqâtilihi muqâbil kull sabiyya ("In numbers... These are the prices payed by IS fighters for one sabiya")," Akhbar Alan, 22 March 2018.


218 Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach, 94.
the risk of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows for “a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops”. Triangulation, however, does not automatically increase the validity of conclusions. My aim has been to distinguish the credible accounts from the not credible accounts by considering the possible validity threats. In practice, this means that I have left out information provided by only one source, and focused on the accounts that recurred often among the interviewees. Often these accounts have been confirmed by external sources like NGOs or independent researchers.

**Ethical considerations**

In addition to raising methodological challenges, the research context raises important ethical issues concerning my own security, the security of the research subjects, and possible unforeseen negative consequences of the research results. At the time of my visits to Mosul, spending long periods in public in Mosul as a foreigner entailed certain security risks. A plethora of armed militias were charged with controlling the various neighborhoods of the city. Although the security situation in general was good in central neighborhoods, the existence of IS sleeper cells and remaining IS-controlled territory in some parts of Iraq and Syria still made kidnapping a small but real threat for foreigners in the city. In western Mosul, unexploded mines left behind by IS were still a real risk even though the main streets had been cleared. For these reasons, I tried to minimize the time spent in public and returned to Erbil before dark. The help of my well-connected Iraqi assistant was invaluable in minimizing security risks and in gaining access to Mosul, which was separated from Erbil by five checkpoints manned by Kurdish soldiers, Iraqi soldiers and the Popular Mobilization Forces. I decided locations for interviews in Mosul based on my assistant’s security recommendations, as well as conversations with international organizations working in the city and staff at the Norwegian embassy in Jordan with responsibility for Iraq. My assistant had long experience working with foreign journalists and researchers in Mosul. Having travelled there every week since the start of the liberation operation in October 2016, he was up-to-date on the security situation in the various neighborhoods. With a few exceptions, we did not visit western Mosul, and stayed away from peripheral neighborhoods whose inhabitants sometimes can be more skeptical to the presence of foreigners. Although the security risk for foreigners is higher than for locals in some respects, local assistants are exposed to risks over a much

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219 Ibid., 112.
longer period of time. It is important to be aware of the tendency to increase exposure to risky situations over time, especially for locals. With this in mind, I considered the security advice from the sources mentioned above, which most often were similar to the advice of my assistant. His detailed knowledge of local languages, dialects and customs significantly eased access to and communication with a wide range of different sources. In a country with sectarian tensions, his Kurdish background was an advantage in access to interviewees, because the mainly Sunni Arab interviewees to a degree perceived Kurds to be disconnected from the central government or Shia militias.

Because of fear of persecution by the government or remaining IS sympathizers, many Maslawis had real concerns for their own security when talking about issues related to IS. Many of my interviewees, especially doctors, stressed that they spoke on the condition of anonymity so that no quotes could be traced back to them. I chose to anonymize all civilians, including those who did not ask to be anonymized, because it is difficult to determine the possible negative consequences that the information shared might have for the interviewees. Exceptions are representatives of the Iraqi government or organizations who were interviewed in their official capacity. Most interviews were conducted in homes, offices or shops to avoid unnecessary attention towards both the interviewees and myself.

When interviewing vulnerable groups like refugees and victims of violence, it is important to keep in mind the risk of re-traumatizing the subjects. As Nathan Ford et al. note, “[a]sking someone to talk about experiences that were frightening, humiliating or degrading can increase the level of trauma associated with the event”.

Nearly all of my interviewees had been victims of violence or had experienced close friends or relatives being harmed or killed, either at the hand of Iraqi regime soldiers or IS members, or as a consequence of the 2016-2017 military campaign. For instance, a majority of my male interviewees had been lashed by IS for breaching rules, and many had been imprisoned or had family members imprisoned. Doctors were traumatized from seeing patients die when treatment was readily available, and gynecologists saw the devastating effects of IS sex slavery when treating kidnapped Yezidi girls in their clinics. Many interviewees had lost their children or other relatives in coalition airstrikes, and all refugees interviewed in camps had experienced traumatic flights, including seeing other refugees starve to death. Because of the aim of my interviews, I often did not delve into these traumatic events in detail because they were often not related to my questions, which focused on IS governance practices. I included few members of the religious

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and ethnic minorities who were most systematically persecuted by IS – Shia Muslims, Christians, Yezidis and others - among my interviewees because they had not experienced contact with the governance structures I investigated. When interviewees described such events, it was often on their own initiative. Most Iraqis are never offered professional psychological help. On the one hand, this meant that many appreciated the opportunity to share experiences and information. On the other hand, it was important to balance being an understanding listener with retaining focus on the questions, as well as the risk of re-traumatizing. 

I avoided interviewing displaced people who had just arrived in a camp, focusing instead on those who had had the chance to settle there. The camps that I visited were managed by Kurdish authorities and international NGOs and were known to have relatively good living conditions. I started every interview by explaining my role as a researcher to avoid being confused with an NGO representative or health worker, which often happened. I clarified the aim of the interview and ensured interviewees that it was anonymous. According to NESH ethical guidelines, “researchers are responsible for explaining to the participants the limitations, expectations and requirements associated with their role as researchers”. 

The aim of this study has partly been to describe the preconditions for, and the obstacles to, efficient governance for an extremist jihadi group. The results presented here may raise ethical questions in themselves. As Baele et al. note, research findings in political violence may “trigger violent dynamics or help contestable actors increase their efficiency and enhance their ability to reach their goals, without necessarily directly impacting either researchers or subjects”. In recent years, research on terror groups has diversified, often producing information on very concrete dynamics and structures that can be of direct use to terror groups. Some examples are radicalization processes, financing of terror groups, or counterinsurgency strategies. On the other end of the spectrum, research into these topics can be used by governments in ways that are beyond the researcher’s control, for example as justification for military action. Funding for certain projects researching IS propaganda has

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222 The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH) note that “the risk of causing minor strain must be balanced against both the benefit of the research for society and the value for the participants”, see B) 12, Responsibility for Avoiding Harm, https://www.etikkom.no/en/ethical-guidelines-for-research/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences--humanities-law-and-theology/b-respect-for-individuals/


been conditioned on sharing the research methods with the intelligence services. Increasing demands that research should have impact can make these problems more prominent. Researchers cannot put constraints on their work to prevent their results from being exploited in unwanted ways in the future, but it can be useful to be aware of these mechanisms.

225 Ibid., 121.
Summary of articles

Article 1: Resistance in the Caliphate’s classrooms

Education has had a central place in the Islamic State’s (IS) political vision since the early days of its propaganda machinery. Education is described by IS as a pillar in its new “state”, and emphasized as even more important than military efforts. Thus, IS developed a plan to transform the education system across its territories in a systematic and centralized way. In Mosul, one of the main laboratories for IS’ state-building efforts, the group met considerable local resistance in its attempt to transform education. The aim of this article is twofold: Firstly, it outlines the main pillars of IS educational reform. Secondly, it shows how IS was taken aback by the substantial resistance that the group met from the local population. Due to this resistance, along with the civil war context, financial constraints and the group’s incompetence in running a modern education system, IS was forced to bring the schools and universities to a halt. The findings in this article support the notion that the success or failure of rebel institution building is highly dependent on the institutional status quo at the time when a rebel group arrives.

Article 2: Mosul’s health system under the Islamic State

Running a full-fledged, universal modern health system was an important part of the Islamic State’s legitimization vis-à-vis Mosul’s inhabitants. The findings in this study suggest that despite the resources at the group’s disposal in the existing health institutions, IS’s management style accelerated the demise of Mosul’s health system. The case of Mosul’s health system under IS demonstrates how rebel groups can combine predatory behavior with substantial attempts at governing. Prioritizing ideological purity and military interests, the group neglected civilians in Iraq’s second biggest governorate. The case of Mosul’s health system under IS demonstrates how rebel groups can combine predatory behavior with substantial attempts at govern.
Article 3: Islamic State policing in Mosul

The image created by the Islamic State of the police forces in its territories was of brutal, efficient, and accountable “servants of the caliph”, providing order and predictability in the war zones that it took over. Many media and research reports to a large degree reproduced this image, sometimes presenting IS police forces as more legitimate than Iraqi police. This article challenges this interpretation, building on interviews with civilians who had first-hand experience with IS police in Mosul. By investigating the perceived efficiency, accountability, and predictability of IS police forces in Mosul, the article demonstrates that civilians’ appreciation for some parts of IS rule did not necessarily translate into legitimacy.
Article 1:

Resistance in the Caliphate’s Classrooms

Mosul civilians’ responses to IS education reform

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Mosul fell to the extremist Islamic State\textsuperscript{226} (IS) in the course of a few days between June 4 and 10, 2014, after Iraqi security forces fled the city. This resulted in an exodus of about 400,000 people from the city and the surrounding area.\textsuperscript{227} During the three years that followed, Mosul’s social, political and economic life was transformed by IS and the Iraqi central government’s deliberate isolation of the city.

When IS took power in Mosul, the city and the larger governorate had around three million inhabitants, a third of whom were students. These were divided among 2,700 schools and higher education institutions,\textsuperscript{228} all under the control of IS and cut off from contact with the central ministry of education in Baghdad. IS soon started developing a full-scale reform of the education system from elementary school to the university level. By spring 2015, the group had developed its own curriculum for primary and secondary schools. Despite the resources spent on this reform, it was abandoned by the end of 2015.

This article investigates the ways in which some of Mosul’s teachers, students and parents sabotaged, bargained with and influenced the implementation of IS educational reform. To understand this reaction, it is necessary to first present its main characteristics. The reform

\textsuperscript{226} I use the name taken by the group following its announcement of a “caliphate” in June 2014. The group has also been known as ISI, ISIL and ISIS. In the interviews in this article, the informants use the name \textit{dāʿish}, or daesh, the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham.

\textsuperscript{227} The International Organization of Migration estimated 375,354 displaced persons from Mosul and surrounding areas in June 2014 alone. See https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/IOM-Iraq-Mosul-Crisis-Activity-Report-3.pdf. The military operation to retake Mosul that started in October 2016 displaced a further 400,000, putting the total number of people displaced from Mosul and the surrounding areas at more than 800,000.

\textsuperscript{228} Interview with Muhammad Ali, general director of education in the Ninawa region, conducted in Erbil, 11.04.16.
would likely have been abandoned regardless of civilian response, owing to the escalating military pressure on IS and to financial constraints. However, the data presented below suggest that civilian resistance did make the implementation of the reform more difficult. The strength of the educational institutions in place at the time of IS’s arrival may have influenced the willingness and ability of Mosul’s civilians to resist IS rule.

Little scholarly research has been done on the nature and dynamics of the institution-building efforts of IS as experienced by local populations. With some notable exceptions, research and policy reports have focused on the vast amounts of available IS propaganda, while comprehensive studies of lived realities are lacking. Many on-the-ground reports are from Syria’s Raqqa province, although Mosul represented the greatest challenge for IS governance in terms of population and complexity. This article is based on 63 interviews with civilians who lived in Mosul under IS rule. These include 33 students, teachers, lecturers, headmasters, professors and administrators, parents of schoolchildren, and high-ranking officials in Ninawa province. The remaining 30 interviewees are civilians who lived for between two months and three years in Mosul under IS rule. The article draws on leaked administrative documents issued by IS concerning education, the IS curriculum, propaganda videos and articles, as well as local and international media and reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The interviews were semi-structured, lasting between 30 minutes and two hours, conducted in Baharka and Debaga refugee camps, and in private homes or public offices in Erbil and Duhok in October and November 2016. Six of the interviewees were still in Mosul at the time of the interview, and some interviews were conducted via telephone or social media. The rest were refugees from IS-controlled areas at the time of their interviews.

The informants were selected on the basis of snowball sampling, using respondents to recruit other respondents. The security situation in Iraq affects the availability and sometimes the trustworthiness of informants. In an atmosphere of harsh repercussions against IS supporters, there is the possibility of an anti-IS bias in their answers. This, however, did not stop

229 Mara Revkin has done comprehensive studies of various aspects of IS governance. See, for example Mara Revkin, "The legal foundations of the Islamic State " (The Brookings Institutions, 2016); "Does the Islamic State Have a “Social Contract”? Evidence from Iraq and Syria."
230 Women and men with a range of socioeconomic and professional backgrounds and ages are represented among my informants. Teachers from a range of different school districts in Mosul city and the surrounding areas were interviewed, representing all levels in the Iraqi school system from primary school to university level. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated by the author.
231 The majority of leaked administrative documents are gathered from Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s online archive (from here on shortened AJTA): http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.
informants from describing what they saw as positive aspects of IS rule. By analyzing the interviews in the light of other sources, I have tried to minimize this risk of bias. More empirically based research is sorely needed to shed light on civilians’ experiences of rebel governance in general and in Mosul in particular. This study’s findings should be seen only as preliminary indications of the dynamics of IS-civilian relations in the Mosul area.

Education in Mosul before IS

Although in some cases education is not a priority on a rebel group’s agenda, sometimes it is seen as a crucial arena for long-term ideological influence over a civilian population.232 The latter, of which IS is a clear example, is often characterized by a strong ideological commitment and a relatively firm control of territory, justifying the prioritization of resources needed for real education reform. When rebels do take control over institutions such as education, communities with high-quality pre-existing institutions are far more likely to resist rebel groups than communities with low-quality institutions, according to some studies.233

Measuring the strength of existing institutions is far from straightforward. However, three indicators are salient: stability, rule enforcement and perceived legitimacy. Strong institutions survive the passage of time and changes in the conditions under which they were created.234 They also have the discipline and capacity to enforce rules and regulations. Prior to 1991, Iraq’s education system was widely regarded as one of the best in the Middle East,235 although one that was highly politicized. Education became a top political priority in the 1970s, when the right of free access to schools and universities was stipulated in the constitution. Under Saddam Hussein, government spending on education was the most generous in the region, resulting in the highest enrollment rates in the Middle East and the near eradication of illiteracy in the 1980s.


233 Arjona, Rebelocracy - Social Order in the Colombian Civil War, 210.


Since then, war, international sanctions and economic crises have reversed many of Iraq’s advances. The heaviest blow to education was the U.S. invasion of 2003 and the ensuing war, which led to the destruction of much of the education infrastructure and large numbers of internal refugees being cut off from education. The Iraqi curriculum is still a political and religious battleground in some ways, and the education system — like other Iraqi institutions — suffers from years of insufficient funding, corruption and a lack of modernization.

Despite these hardships, I argue that the educational institutions that IS attempted to take over in Mosul were relatively strong considering the context. Iraq has managed to reverse some of the setbacks since 2003. Enrollment in primary education has grown at record speed in the past decade and was back to 90 percent in 2011, while enrollment in secondary education grew from 49.2 percent in 2000 to 79.1 percent in 2013. In Mosul, the main university and most of the schools remained functional throughout the civil war. Mosul University was widely regarded as an important educational center in the Middle East prior to 2014, and until 2003 was a study destination for students from other countries in the region. The teacher informants in this article describe a tightly knit collective of dedicated colleagues organized in teachers’ unions. During and after IS’s hold on the city, makeshift “campuses” were organized by exiled Mosul University staff members in Duhok, Erbil, Kirkuk and other Iraqi cities so that internally displaced students could avoid interrupting their studies. The continuity of universally available education in the city during the recent circumstances attests to a significant degree of institutional stability.

The perceived legitimacy of institutions is also important in assessing their strength; it indicates people’s willingness to defend them. Comprehensive data on this are lacking, but my informants stressed how the importance of education is a historical part of the identity of Maslawis (residents of Mosul), regardless of the use and abuse of these institutions by changing political regimes. The informants from the city center emphasized that this

236 Ibid., 28.
239 The Islamic State and the military offensives against it have again devastated Iraq’s education infrastructure and created a historic number of IDPs cut off from education.
240 This point was also made during the rebuilding efforts starting in late 2017, for example by the blogger Mosul Eye: https://twitter.com/MosulEye/status/933799525180944384.
differentiated them from the “simple village people” in rural areas. The informants from villages surrounding Mosul expressed their belief that schooling for their children was a top priority, even in wartime. This is not to say that schools and universities were seen as infallible; far from it. Yet, recognition of their problems does not seem to diminish the informants’ general respect for the schools and universities and students’ eagerness to enroll in them.

The relative solidity of the educational institutions should be seen in relation to Mosul’s vital civil society, which supplemented limited governmental funding for institutions and bolstered their strength. Mara Revkin has suggested in her studies on IS state building that this feature may have provided more fertile ground for resistance in Mosul than, for example, in Syria’s Raqqa province.241 Following Mosul’s liberation from IS in 2017 and the widespread destruction it entailed, a large-scale grassroots-driven initiative to rebuild the university was launched by civil-society groups.242 A book festival was arranged on campus, followed by a successful international campaign to collect books and restore the university’s looted and burned libraries.243 The various faculties resumed courses while the buildings were still in ruins. Driven largely by students and teachers, without any substantial support from the authorities, this indicates the existence of a potent civil society with the will and capacity to organize despite the authorities in place at a given time. Dozens of similar campaigns were launched in other sectors of society. According to Sarah D. Shields in Mosul before Iraq, the adaptability of the city’s population to political realities has characterized Mosul since the Ottoman period.244 Many of the informants mention this historical legacy when explaining their resistance to IS’s education reform.

The IS plan

Schools and universities are central to the IS narrative of successful state building. The group underlines how their efforts in this sector prove that IS is, in fact, a state and not merely an organization.245 It describes education as more important than military efforts for effective long-term rule:

245 The Islamic State, Dabiq, no. 8, 2015, 65.
And the education system is of no less importance than the military sector, but actually is greater in influence than the military sector, for the military sector has been put in place to subjugate the people to the ṭāghūt [tyranny] by iron and fire, while the education system has been put in place to do away with the signs of the religion, make people support the ṭāghūt, and ingrain its ideas and principles through persuasion and instruction.246

Education is described as “the gate through which organizations enter to spread their principles, establish the pillars of their rule and secure the loyalty of the people and their support for them”.247 Education under the old Iraqi and Syrian regimes is portrayed as destructive sacrilegious indoctrination; being educated in the “infidel” schools of the previous regimes is in fact, described as a fate worse than death.248 This is contrasted with the new IS education system, where children’s only stated wish is to become mujāhidīn for the Islamic State, learning to reject infidel rulers.249 In the new IS schools, there is no room for “usury interests, principles of nationalism, racism, pseudo-historical events or geographical divisions that also contravene Islamic shariʿa.”250 Educational institutions, then, are seen as an important arena of unwanted ideological and political ideas, such as Baathism and nationalism, to be replaced with IS’s brand of jihadi-Salafism. Rather than being valuing in itself, education is ultimately seen as a tool for the “caliphate’s” military survival and expansion.

In Mosul, the group’s urgency to control the education system became clear when high-ranking IS members summoned the teachers at Mosul University to a meeting only a few weeks after the takeover of the city.251 Among the delegates present was IS education minister Dhu al-Qarnayn, an man of Egyptian origin, and Khaled Jamil Muhammad, a Maslawi appointed to be the new president of the university.252 The aim of the meeting was to design a plan for a new all-encompassing education system under IS to produce well-educated, useful

247 Ibid.
249Ibid.
250 The Islamic State, notice, Mosul, September 2014, specimen A in AJTA, http://www.aymennjawad.org/15946/aspects-of-islamic-state-is-administration-in
251 Interviews with teachers from Mosul University, conducted in Erbil, October 2016.
252 Al-Qarnayn was part of the original Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi network in Iraq which was IS’ ideological forerunner. See Al-Tamimi, “The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence,” 124.
and modern Muslims to serve the Islamic State. One teacher who attended the meeting recounts it in the following way:

They came armed; the room was packed with people. They asked the teachers to propose ideas on how to reform the education system, and some did. One professor, for example, proposed that they could teach more Asian languages, because of the number of Muslims from Asian countries. This suggestion was well received by IS; they liked the idea.\(^{253}\)

On paper, the IS regulations in Ninawa province are identical to the system the group has claimed to be implementing in Syria’s Raqqa province. While Raqqa has sometimes been termed the testing ground for new aspects of IS governance, Mosul was undoubtedly the greatest challenge in the realm of education. The pillars of its educational reform in Mosul were the following: restructuring the education directorate, changing the content of courses and curriculum, and gearing education towards IS’s military needs.\(^{254}\) The group introduced school fees, gender segregation and strict dress codes.

While certain decisions were made at the local level and varied accordingly, such as those regarding fees, curriculum reform was overseen by the \(dīwān\ al-ta ‘līm\), the IS education ministry in Mosul. IS painted a picture of running a full-fledged ministry of education in Mosul, and minutes from a meeting in June 2015 even encouraged people to submit applications for jobs under the \(dīwān\ al-ta ‘līm\).\(^{255}\) My interviews indicate, however, that the education administration was reduced to its very basic functions under the group’s rule. This was in part because many employees fled Mosul or boycotted the new rule, and in part because IS itself greatly reduced the capacity and workload of the directorate. An employee in the education directorate of Mosul described how their work changed after IS arrived:

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\text{[M]ost of our normal tasks stopped, and they replaced the name with } dīwān \text{ al-ta ‘līm. Other than that, they just came and went now and then, just a few people, around } 20, \text{ they did not stay there all the time. They were just supervising us and showing that they were in control; they did not replace us or move us.}\(^{256}\)
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This echoes the situation in other directorates taken over by IS, which were either shut down or greatly reduced. Most of the directorates — with the exception of those concerned with

\(^{253}\) Interview with teacher from Mosul University, conducted by phone, 03.12.17.

\(^{254}\) In addition to education, IS has been conducting programs for forced military training for children. See Max Taylor John G. Horgan, Mia Bloom, Charlie Winter “From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2016); and Malik, “The Children of Islamic State”.


\(^{256}\) Interview with employee from the education directorate of Mosul, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
health, education, water, electricity and sewage — were closed down and their buildings repurposed as jails or storage facilities and for other functions deemed more crucial by the Islamic State.

Both IS propaganda videos and administrative documents show that IS intended to enroll all teachers in their territories in mandatory “repentance” sessions, in which each teacher was forced to confirm their allegiance to Islamic State doctrine, abjuring any sympathies for the existing regimes. Repentance was mandatory for everyone associated with education:

The repentance will be carried out for all those who worked in the prior education system (director, supervisor, deputy director, temporaries, fixed, non-fixed, retired, employment of youth, employee, guard). And similarly for teachers in the universities and institutes.

Of my informants from Mosul and surrounding villages under IS control, none reported that they had been called to any formal repentance session. This is supported by the absence of such sessions in IS propaganda directly mentioning Mosul. The informants describe how IS representatives briefly visited each primary and secondary school in the weeks following June 2014 and gave general instructions to focus the teaching on religion and abolish certain subjects.

At the university level, new deans sympathizing with IS were appointed in some faculties. All courses teaching art, philosophy, music, social studies, history, religion, sports and psychology were shut down immediately. The medical faculties of both Mosul and Raqqa were prioritized above all others. In Mosul, only the medical faculties (medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry) and the science faculties (chemistry, physics, biology) stayed open under IS. In its propaganda, the group claimed to have completely restructured medical education in Mosul and Raqqa, scrapping “superfluous subjects that are irrelevant to a physician’s day-to-day work” and reducing the length of medical studies from six to three years. While IS

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259 Interviews with medical students from Mosul University, conducted on social media, 27.06.17.

260 The Islamic State, “ta’lim ilā kāfat al-mu’assasāt al-tarbawiyya wat-ta’limiyya” (“Declaration to all education institutions”), 2014, signed by Dhu al-Qarnayn, http://i.huffpost.com/gen/3765150/thumbs/o-6-570.jpg?6. The Islamic State: “ta’lim ilā malākāt jāmiʿat al-mosul wal-maʿāhid min al-tadrisīn wal-idārīn wal-muwazzafīn” (Declaration to the personnel of Mosul’s universities and institutes, its teachers, administrative employees and other employees”), 2014, https://justpaste.it/mosuluninotice. According to my interviewees, the immediate elimination of these courses was carried out as planned.

261 Ibid.
presents this as their own creation, it is a truncated version of the medical curriculum already in place. IS’s interest in medical education may be explained by the pressing need for a stable supply of doctors to treat wounded soldiers, as many doctors had been among the first refugees to leave the city following June 2014. IS’s reformed medical studies never materialized in Mosul, but the group announced a shortening of medical studies from six to five years. This was not implemented in practice, because the university was closed shortly afterward. The general neglect of the university indicates that the group did not prioritize higher education apart from medicine and science. IS had a more ideological approach to primary, secondary and tertiary levels, as seen in the group’s new curricula.

Until the fall of 2015, after what IS termed a “transitional school year”, the existing official curriculum was retained. Teaching continued with a reduced version of the curriculum and only limited supervision by IS. During the transitional school year, an IS-appointed committee of around 50 local teachers developed more than 60 schoolbooks under the strict supervision of Dhu al-Qarnayn. In addition to the books, IS developed several educational videos and mobile applications for children. According to informants present at the university, the majority of the teachers participated in the committee against their will, while some did sympathize with the IS ideology and educational project. When the curriculum was completed after nine months, books were not handed out in hardcopy but were given to teachers in PDF format on CDs for the pupils to print at their own cost. The purpose of the books is spelled out in the introduction to each copy:

We hereby lay down the first building block of an Islamic education, based on [this] curriculum, guided by the prophecy and the understanding of the first righteous ancestors and their original flock, and a clear vision which is not eastern nor western, but Qur’anic and prophetic, far from the whims, the untruths and the errors of calls to socialism in the East or capitalism in the West, or the agents of the [political] parties and errant curriculum in various corners of the Earth.

IS devoted nearly a year to the development of new schoolbooks, which paint a picture of a holistic worldview, with references throughout to the ideology, militarism and political

262 Interviews with medical students from Mosul University, conducted in Erbil, October 2016.
263 The Islamic State, declaration, September 2014, https://justpaste.it/ninawaschoolsnotice
264 The Islamic State, video, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS7zJLjuTcl. In this video, intended to teach children the alphabet, the letters are sung in the form of a nashid, associating each letter with a jihadi or Islamic concept.
265 Interview with lecturer from Mosul University, conducted on the phone, 06.02.17.
266 This introduction is included in most of the new books, for example, IS books for science, Qur’an studies and history.
project of IS. Most of these books never saw the light of day in any classroom, as school attendance decreased for reasons detailed below. They do, however, provide a window into IS’s educational ambitions and its vision of what an idealized inhabitant of its state should learn. The religion books make up a large part of the curriculum, revolving around direct reading of the Qur’an. Throughout the books are instructions to the teachers to recite verses from the Qur’an. Anāshīd, or hymns composed by IS, are an important part of the readings. One of the texts for the second grade hails the children of the “caliphate” as “cubs”, the next generation of fighters.267

Most of the textbooks have a clear militaristic stamp, with pictures of Kalashnikovs, guns and tanks even in sections such as geology that are unrelated to combat. In mathematics, the pupils are taught to multiply tanks and guns; recognize the shape of fighter jets, rockets and bazookas; and count bullets and IS flags. IS has its own textbook for the secondary level to teach the visual programming language Scratch, with examples of how to create videos of fighting scenes.268

Physical exercise, history and Islamic studies were removed in the transitional period and replaced with IS versions after the new curriculum was ready, with physical exercise for boys changed to military training.269 In line with other IS propaganda, much effort was put into the books’ visual design, with some teachers describing it as “more modern-looking” than the official Iraqi curriculum.270 The content does not fall short of the state curriculum in terms of complexity and progress for the different levels. In fact, the religion books intended for six-year-olds were deemed too complex for their age level by teachers interviewed. Young children are expected to read complex Qur’anic texts and delve into the concepts of Islamic jurisprudence. Simultaneously, children at the same level are taught how to read and write letters in a different textbook. Many of the teachers criticized what they saw as IS’s lack of understanding of pedagogy, as these comments from a Mosul headmaster show:

A pupil in the first class can hardly read the letters, how can he read long paragraphs from the Qur’an?
It is beyond the children’s abilities; it doesn’t do anything for them and is just a waste of time.271

268 The Islamic State, book, “Muqaddamāt al-barmaja bi-istikhdām skratsh li-kāfat ṣufūf al-marḥala al-mutawasīṭa” (“Introduction in the use of the program Scratch for all grades, middle level”)
269 The Islamic State, “Al-ʾiḍād al-badanī, al-mustawa al-awwal” (Physical exercise, first level”)
270 Interview with teacher from school in Mosul, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
271 Interview with headmaster from Mosul school, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
The bulk of modern history is scrapped in the new curriculum in favor of a focus on the prophet Muhammad’s lifetime.\textsuperscript{272} History is portrayed as naturally culminating in the Islamic State. Several of the books are less clearly tied to the IS political project. In the course al-adab al-shara’iyya\textsuperscript{273} the children are taught good manners according to the shari’a. The course al-‘ulūm (science) encompasses subjects as diverse as the organs of the human body, family structure, mosques, housing, healthy food, animals, plants, illness, and how to brush your teeth with a mishwāk, a wooden pick.\textsuperscript{274} Environmental awareness and the importance of eating enough vegetables are underlined. The course al-jaghrāfiyya (geography) focuses on topography and natural phenomena.\textsuperscript{275}

The schoolbooks are characterized by piecemeal use of various Islamic and Salafi sources. They target nationalism and democracy as un-Islamic and dismiss the traditional Sunni schools of law, promoting one monolithic Islam devoid of ijtihād, independent reasoning. All subjects are written with the clear aim of justifying and legitimizing the building of the “caliphate” and the use of violence against deviants, including Muslims, as explained in the context of the apocalypse.

As shown above, the IS educational reform plan in Mosul was ambitious and wide-ranging. On the ground, it soon ran into practical challenges, such as some Maslawis’ unwillingness to implement it in the classroom.

Civilian resistance

Civilian resistance to the new IS educational program took different and overlapping forms that can be summarized as follows, loosely based on Shane Joshua Barter’s categories of civilian resistance in war:\textsuperscript{276} everyday resistance, engagement and defiance. As will be described below, defiance is open opposition to the rulers, while everyday resistance and engagement are more subtle forms of resistance.

Everyday resistance

The vast majority of the resistance to IS’s education system was what I call everyday

\textsuperscript{272} The Islamic State, “Al-tārīkh lil-ṣaff al-khāmis al-ibtidā’i” (“History for fifth grade”)
\textsuperscript{273} The Islamic State, “Al-adab al-shara’iyya lil-ṣaff al-khāmis al-ibtidā’i” (“Shari’a manners for fifth grade”)
\textsuperscript{274} The Islamic State, “Al-‘ulūm lil-ṣaff al-awwal al-ibtidā’i” (“Science for first grade”)
\textsuperscript{275} The Islamic State, “Al-jaghrāfiyya lil-ṣaff al-khāmis al-ibtidā’i” (“Geography for fifth grade”)
resistance. Decisions to act were taken either by single individuals or by small groups in discrete conversations with colleagues and friends in private or in school corridors. Everyday resistance\(^{277}\) is a covert form of defiance that does not require coordination and is less risky than overt defiance.

The most striking form of everyday resistance is the sudden fall in school attendance. According to my informants, a majority of the pupils and students stopped attending classes during the first months of IS’s attempted reform. The majority of the teachers interviewed report that most of their colleagues did not go to work unless they were directly threatened with repercussions by IS.\(^{277}\) These observations are bolstered by other reports from the ground.\(^{279}\) Some teachers in Mosul and the surrounding areas are reported to have actively worked with IS, but these reports are exceptions.\(^{280}\) Several factors contributed to the dramatic reduction in school attendance. The cutting of teachers’ salaries in 2015 made it economically difficult for teachers to work. IS did not pay salaries to teachers independently of the central government in Baghdad. According to the education directorate in Mosul, approximately 3,000 teachers decided to retire early after IS took control of the city.\(^{281}\) It is noteworthy, however, that the teachers’ attendance decreased while the teachers were still receiving their salaries. The emptying of Mosul’s classrooms started during the transitional school year. Among the teachers I interviewed, only four remained on the job after the transitional year. Many report that the 2015–16 school year saw mostly children of IS members or sympathizers attending classes. The same trend is as clear in primary and secondary education as at the university level. There are some reports of teachers organizing secret private classes in their own homes to avoid teaching the IS curriculum. Teachers who were forced to work told students they trusted not to come to classes. As the number of pupils and students fell, teachers used this in meetings with IS as arguments for shutting down the schools and fields of study in the university. A former medical student at the university recounts:

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\(^{278}\) Exact teacher attendance numbers are difficult to establish. The Ninawa educational directorate reported that four out of more than 700 teachers in the IS-held village of Qayyara kept working under IS. Interview with Muhammad Ali, the general director of education in the Ninawa region, conducted in Erbil, November 4, 2016.


\(^{280}\) Interview of Muhammad Ali, the general director of education in the Ninawa region, in Erbil, 04.11.16.

\(^{281}\) Interview with mid-level manager from the education directorate in Mosul, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
The teachers told us not to care about IS, to just focus on our old curriculum and keep studying and go home, keep away from IS. They told us that they were forced to teach us, and they intended to leave at the first opportunity. And many did.  

The teachers who decided to stay at home, did so without directly confronting IS. Teachers described it as a “closed circle”:

> Our opposition to dāʿi sh was secret, it was a closed circle between the teachers, the pupils, the supervisor and the headmaster. We only told the pupils who we trust to not come to school. If that information was passed on to dāʿi sh, they would have beheaded us immediately. They used to hang people they had killed from the bridge.

The acts that I categorize as “everyday resistance” were not established through any formal agreements among teachers and students but were often agreed upon in private conversations. The account of a primary-school teacher on the outskirts of Mosul is representative of my informants’ description of this process:

> Most of the teachers in our school and the other schools in our district agreed to stop teaching. How can I teach the son of a friend how to kill and how to bomb himself? We did not have a meeting about this among the teachers, but we talked about it. We did not say it directly to dāʿi sh of course, because, as you know, they are not human. Everyone said that they would not teach. I would not do it even if they killed me. I will not commit their sins.

At the university level, IS was met with a similar silent response, starting at the initial meeting on campus. Several meetings were held in the university library to plan the new IS curriculum, with only a handful of teachers attending despite the threat of sanctions if they did not. One of the university teachers present at the meeting recounted in my interview,

> Some [of my colleagues] did not attend the meeting, and some had already fled the city. [IS’s president of the university] asked the scholars and the teachers to give their advice on how to develop the education and the schoolbooks. In the beginning, they were friendly towards us teachers. At first, they tried to co-opt us and make us cooperate. They sent someone who was a professor and who had joined dāʿi sh; he went to all the teachers and tried to convince us to work for them. He argued that it was important for the sake of our children’s future.

This initial friendliness faded when it became clear that none of the teachers would volunteer to develop the new IS curriculum. IS eventually forcibly appointed a committee. On several

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282 Interview with former medical student from Mosul University, conducted by phone, October 19, 2016.
283 Interview with teacher from school in Mosul, conducted in Debaga camp, 11.10.16.
284 Interview with teacher from school in Mosul, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
285 Interview with lecturer from Mosul University, conducted on the phone, 06.02.17.
occasions, IS officials scolded teachers who skipped classes, threatening to kill them and burn their homes with their families inside.  

On some occasions, IS officials posted written warnings that the teachers who failed to go to work would be executed for treason, along with a list of the names of teachers who refrained from working. The teachers who were personally threatened with punishment most often followed orders and returned to school for a time, and then stopped attending again. In some cases, IS would withhold part of the salary of the teachers who did not come to work. The salaries of public employees in Mosul, including the teachers, were paid by the Iraqi government until they stopped in 2015 as part of the government’s economic blockade of IS-occupied areas. An employee in education administration in greater Mosul recounts:

Deciding not to teach was a tough response, also economically — dāʿish cut the salaries of those who did not go to work, by fifty thousand dinar. The economic situation of the teachers was already very bad, so they suffered because of their tough response to dāʿish. But we did not want to do what they wanted and take their money.

At the beginning of November 2015, Dhu al-Qarnayn summoned the teachers in Mosul’s primary schools to a meeting in the directorate of education. Here, he repeated the obligation of all children to attend school, threatening violent repercussions for those who refused. The calls to attend school were repeated several times in mosques and on posters in the city. According to one of my interviewees, several dozen teachers were arrested during this initial period because of the lack of pupils in the classrooms. Later in November 2015, yet another meeting with Dhu al-Qarnayn took place in the directorate of education, to which parents were invited. The tone was now more demanding. Al-Qarnayn warned the parents, emphasizing that it was a religious duty to send their children to the IS-run schools.

These reactions from IS show that they were aware of the teachers’ unwillingness to comply with their rule, despite efforts to avoid direct confrontations. Equally, IS was aware of the

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286 Ibid.
288 Interviews with teachers, conducted in Erbil, October 2016.
289 Interview with administration employee in the education directorate, conducted in Debaga camp, 11.10.16.
291 Ibid.
292 Interview with mid-level manager from the education directorate in Mosul, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
possibility that university students would organize against their rule and so they recruited informants as spies. One medical student, a representative for her level, recounts how she was taken to an IS court and accused of plotting against IS in a Facebook group:

They said the people in our group were likely to organize a rally against them and I was one of the accused. [...] It was just a normal group, but dāʾish was scared and wanted to stop all gatherings of students. They arrested some members of our group, who were imprisoned and tortured for 11 days. I managed to avoid getting arrested. I was only taken to a dāʾish court and questioned by a judge. He looked very nervous. He did not find proof against me, and my position was somewhat strong. Then he tried to get out of me any information about opposition to dāʾish among my colleagues. [...] They were scared of us because we were young men and women and they often heard talk against dāʾish. They thought that if this continued there was a risk that we would rise up against them.

Engagement

When teachers or students were personally confronted by IS officials in formal or informal meetings, many actively engaged and bargained with IS to avoid implementing the changes. Instead of succumbing to IS demands or flat-out refusing them, they found excuses. One professor argued in front of IS that he was not competent to write the IS schoolbooks that they requested him to:

I said, "No, I cannot do it because I am a researcher, a teacher, I am not someone who writes books for students." In the end, they let it go. They forced some of the other teachers to do it.

In one school, the teachers argued against IS’s imposition of the hijab on first-grade girls. The arguments led IS to abandon this requirement for the youngest girls. The headmaster of the school in question recounted:

We tried to negotiate in a clever way. For example, we said that it is difficult to make the small girls wear the hijab; they would only take it off. So [IS] agreed that the first and second class were exempted from the hijab. Of course, we knew that it was not right to force the hijab on the older girls either.
Several teachers were approached by IS members and asked to use the curriculum for IS military purposes on the battlefield. The leader of a high school described one such meeting:

They tried to pressure us into making changes, but we tried to respond in a clever way. For example, if they tried to make us use some machine or electricity for their purpose, we said: “This is not possible, the machine has limits, we cannot do anything about that.” We blamed it on the science and said that it was not in our hands. And IS accepted this, they had no other choice, because the IS people had a low level of education and did not really understand anything of science.\textsuperscript{298}

The students who remained on campus had little direct contact with IS except when they were rebuked for violating the dress code or sex segregation. When students were arrested on campus, they and their fellow students often tried to escape by bargaining. A medical student recounts:

One time a man from the \textit{hisba} [IS religious police] came into the cafeteria and arrested a student for wearing too-tight trousers. The student tried to convince him that it was his body that was fat, not the trousers that were too tight. When someone was arrested by the \textit{hisba}, other students would try to negotiate with them and say that they did not break the rules, or complain that their rules changed every day. Some told them that our Prophet did not like the color black that they imposed on us.\textsuperscript{299}

Sometimes the negotiation attempts were successful, other times not. Nevertheless, these and other examples indicate that the teachers and students did have some influence against IS, through knowing the workings of the educational system and using personal relations with colleagues and friends. As in other sectors of society, IS was depending on the local teachers’ goodwill and know-how in administering education, since they often lacked the expertise themselves. While changing the curriculum for primary and secondary levels was achievable, especially with the help of local teachers, creating new content for the range of subjects taught at the university level was next to impossible. Knowing this, the university lecturers interviewed in my study ignored IS’s instructions as long as they were not personally threatened with sanctions.

With some exceptions, the content of university classes was left untouched by IS. Some IS officials were installed in leading positions at the university, but almost never as teachers. IS advertised in mosques for university lecturers, which indicates that they intended to replace some of the academic staff.\textsuperscript{300} The few attempts that were made to install IS-friendly lecturers,

\textsuperscript{298} Interview with the assistant manager of a high school in Mosul, conducted in Erbil, 03.11.16.
\textsuperscript{299} Interview with medical student from Mosul University, conducted on social media, 27.06.17.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
however, were not respected by the academic staff. Many of the lecturers describe IS’s attempts to teach at higher levels and run a university as “a laughing matter”. The headmaster at a technical college lamented that one of his former students, who had failed almost all his courses, had returned to the school as an IS member and was put in charge of a whole department.

Most of the university eventually stopped functioning, except the medical faculties. Parts of the campus were repurposed to store and manufacture weapons; other parts were turned into a headquarters, which led the coalition against IS to bomb it several times in the course of 2016. At the time when the university was closed following several rounds of bombing by the Iraqi-led coalition in November 2016, only a handful of students and lecturers were still attending — lecturers who IS forced to attend and students who sympathized with the group. The university remained closed after November 2016. Most of the remaining facilities seem to have been destroyed by IS fighters.

Defiance

Defiance includes the most visible and risky form of resistance: direct confrontations to challenge the armed group or mobilize public opinion. According to a UN report, a number of teachers were killed for refusing to change the curriculum to conform to IS ideology. For instance, four teachers were abducted from a college in Mosul in January 2015 because they opposed the IS reform, and their whereabouts are unknown. A primary-school teacher in Tel Afar was executed for the same reason. The persecution of noncomplying teachers was not systematic, but was widely announced when it did occur.

Several informants recounted stories of colleagues who were killed for their open opposition to IS. One was primary-school teacher Ashwaq al-Naimi, who was publicly executed by IS on

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301 Interview with administrative employee and lecturer from Mosul University, conducted in Erbil, 03.11.16.
302 Interview with administrative assistant manager from a Mosul high school, conducted in Erbil, 03.11.16.
305 MacDiarmid, "Mosul University after ISIL: Damaged but defiant."
September 17, 2014, for refusing to follow IS teaching instructions.  

Ashwaq al-Naimi is now referred to on social media and in the news as a martyr and an icon of Mosul’s resistance. According to my informants and news reports of the incident, she criticized IS teaching instructions in front of her pupils in the girls’ school where she worked, refusing to teach what she called racist thoughts. A university friend and colleague of al-Naimi recounted the incident in the following way:

She told her students: “This curriculum is not suitable for the people of Mosul. The people of Mosul are educated (muthaqafa), we love life, and we live together, all the different sects side by side, with our Christian brothers and our Yezidi brothers”.

Al-Naimi’s classroom speech soon reached IS ears as one of her pupils reported it to her parents, who then informed the IS police. Al-Naimi was arrested and executed by a gunshot to the head a few days later; it was filmed and broadcast online. She had been given the opportunity to repent in front of an IS court, but declined. Al-Naimi’s colleague describes the impact of the killing among the teachers:

It was a very painful event, bringing everyone into a state of strong grief. This turned many people against da’ish; they kept this event in their hearts. It showed the true path of da’ish really is: killing.

Many university students describe direct confrontations with the IS hisba on campus, for example concerning the dress codes. One medical student described how he and his friends went many times to protest the rules:

The female students had problems doing the studies because they had to wear a niqāb and gloves. We went to the hisba on campus and told them that this was not right, we have our rights, they should not force people to behave in a way they did not want. They told us to not worry about this and focus on our studies.

Some residents explained their lack of attendance at IS-run schools by referring to concerns for their own and their children’s personal security due to coalition air raids. They did not intend to subvert the Islamic State. These informants account for less than one-fifth of my interviews, and they were exclusively from villages in the greater Mosul area, not the main city.

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310 "Man hiyya ashwāq al-na’imi.. al-mu’allima alatī ’adamaha dā’ish?,” Rudaw 2015.
311 Interview with teacher from a Mosul primary school, conducted in Duhok, 11.10.16.
312 Ibid.
313 Interview with medical student from Mosul University, conducted by phone, 19.10.16.
Why did this occur in Mosul?

In their interviews, informants expressed a clear rationale for opposing IS education. Parents and teachers rejected the idea that IS’s violent ideology, which they describe as immoral and un-Islamic, should be planted in their children’s and students’ minds. They argued that the IS educational system did not represent the values of the people of Mosul. University students saw IS as an anti-intellectual, anti-knowledge movement that because of its ignorance and incompetence would only have a destructive effect on their learning and on the city’s higher-education institutions.314 The stated goal of these acts of resistance was clear: to subvert the IS attempt to control education, even if it meant that the whole system would grind to a halt for the foreseeable future. Although initially the IS takeover was met with cautious optimism and anticipation by many Maslawis, this was soon replaced by fear and disbelief when the full scope of its brutal rule became evident.315 At the time that IS introduced its new curriculum, approximately one year after the takeover, little of the initial support was left. This quote from one Mosul professor is typical of how the informants narrate the turn of events and their own role:

“When IS went into Mosul, this ancient city known for its uniqueness, its traditions, and especially its scientific traditions, with its rich educational environment, it took them by surprise. They decided to use all these things and invest them in the construction of their caliphate. They thought these existing institutions and organizations were ideal to spread their thoughts. But they did not count on the response of Mosul society to their plan — from the inhabitants, from the educational staff, from the students themselves, even from some children, and especially from the families and the parents. Maslawis’ tough response turned IS’s plan to use the educational system into a failure.316

Considering the general IS crackdown on opposition in Mosul, it would have been reasonable to expect a lack of collective action in the realm of education. Although there was a consensus among the informants that IS’s education was destructive, one might expect that no individual would act because of the risk of imprisonment or execution.317 Research suggests that paying the costs involved in collective resistance is justified when armed groups significantly

314 The fact that the central Iraqi government stopped recognizing education from areas under IS control is an additional explanation for why many students eventually stopped attending classes.
315 Revkin, "Does the Islamic State Have a “Social Contract”? Evidence from Iraq and Syria," 27.
316 Interview with administrative employee and lecturer from Mosul University, conducted in Erbil, 03.11.16.
threaten the institutional status quo that civilians want to preserve. Strong institutions provide bargaining power; civilians can threaten, even implicitly, the possibility of collective action. Teachers, students and parents in Mosul reported that they were influenced by the acts of others. As a manager at the education directorate in Mosul recounted:

I did not let my son go to school, because I knew how their education was. It is racist thinking, it is about forcing everyone into one path. They were teaching children how to use weapons. Because of this, the parents kept their children at home. I was working in the education directorate, so people were influenced by my decision to not let my son go. Then they decided to do the same.

The findings suggest that the strength of Mosul’s educational institutions was greater than IS’s capacity and organizational strength to change them. My interviews show that the implementation of the IS educational reform was highly dependent on which IS member was sent to do the job. This was true in the cases of clothing restrictions, dealing with opposing teachers and implementing changes in the classroom. It is well documented that both Iraqis and foreigners had a wide range of reasons for working with IS. While some were driven by ideological and religious conviction, others worked with the group for predominantly economic reasons and the lack of alternatives. As Barbara F. Walter has shown, average citizens may be inclined to support an extremist group if they believe it will win the war, regardless of their own convictions. The mix of foreign and local recruits with different motivations creates organizational challenges for IS. This not only underlines the problems of seeing IS as a monolithic organization. It also suggests that extremist organizations run the risk of encountering civilian resistance when met with relatively strong and locally grounded institutions.

The scope of rebel interference, another factor influencing resistance, according to Ana Arjona, is prominent in the case of Mosul. Rather than gradually changing the education curriculum and involving the teachers, IS violently imposed its all-encompassing plan, erasing many years of carefully developed curricula with the stroke of a pen in order to create the next

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318 See for example, Arjona, "Civilian Resistance to Rebel Governance1," 194.
320 Interview with a mid-level manager in the education directorate in Mosul, conducted in Baharka camp, 18.10.16.
generation of jihadis. Both teachers and parents feared that IS’s indoctrination attempts could have immediate and irreversible effects on the children. According to their accounts, this prompted a determined and quick response.

Conclusion

By restructuring the educational administration, changing the content of classes and militarizing instruction, IS set out to turn Mosul’s educational institutions into a vehicle for their own political and military project. This article has detailed how IS encountered civilian resistance from parts of Mosul’s population in its attempt to implement this in the city’s classrooms. The civil-war context and the group’s worsening financial situation were decisive factors in explaining why the reform came to a halt before being fully realized. My data suggest that civilian resistance in the education sector also influenced IS’s implementation of its reform to some degree. The findings support Ana Arjona’s theory that the success or failure of rebel institution building is influenced by the strength of institutions in place when a rebel group arrives. The educational institutions in Mosul have maintained a level of strength and popularity despite difficult circumstances under shifting regimes. This, along with the scope of IS’s reform plans, may have created fertile ground for civilian resistance in the classrooms and school corridors of the so-called caliphate.

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Article 2:

Mosul’s Health System under the Islamic State

Predator state-building

Introduction

In June 2014, all health facilities in Iraq’s third-largest city Mosul fell under the direct control of the Islamic State and became incorporated as a vital part of the group’s new “state”. All communication with the health ministry in Baghdad was cut off. Despite being hailed in the propaganda as a proof of the group’s state-building capacity, the health system in Mosul rapidly deteriorated on Islamic State’s watch. IS’s management of the health sector in Mosul highlights the many conflicting interests that a rebel group attempting to govern must grapple with. This article is based on interviews with, among others, health professionals and other civilians who lived in Mosul under IS rule, as well as my own visits to formerly IS-run hospitals in Mosul. Along with a comprehensive analysis of leaked administrative IS documents from the health sector, IS propaganda, existing research and other secondary sources, the article seeks to complement existing knowledge on how IS governed one of the most vital institutions in its “caliphate”.

Rebel groups have often been described as geared either towards short-term predation on civilians and resources, or towards long-term construction of institutions and ideologies. Various explanations have been given for which trajectory a rebel group takes. For instance, Jeremy Weinstein distinguishes between opportunistic and activist rebellions, positing that the resources available to the rebels determine the future nature of the movement. “Where the economic resources are available to meet the start-up costs of rebellion, the extended process of shaping identities, mobilizing networks, and building ideologues is often cut short”. 323

323 Weinstein, Inside Rebellion, 52.
William Reno has argued that so-called predatory rebels do sometimes engage in state building, as in his case of the Liberian NPFL, but they do so exclusively for their own immediate economic and political benefit. The “institutions” they run are hollow shells intended to create outside recognition and ease the exploitation of civilians.\footnote{Reno, "Predatory Rebellions and Governance: The National Patriotic Front of Liberia, 1989-1992," 269.}

By examining IS governance of Mosul’s health system between 2014 and 2017, I seek to nuance the dichotomy between predatory and state-building rebels. Running institutions means giving up some of the flexibility needed in a civil war.\footnote{José Ciro Martínez and Brent Eng, “Stifling stateness: The Assad regime’s campaign against rebel governance,” \textit{Security Dialogue} 49, no. 4 (2018): 4.} Like all rebels who aspire to govern civilians, IS had to balance ideological purity, the wish to garner civilian support, military needs, and the pragmatism needed to efficiently administer its “proto-state”. Despite their seemingly apolitical character, hospital wards and corridors, surgical theatres, pharmacies and doctors’ offices became deeply entangled in IS’s political and military project. The findings presented here suggest that rebels can combine predatory rule with substantial governance of civilians. On the one hand, IS kept health services open for civilians for long stretches of its rule, seemingly channeling significant resources to the benefit of the civilian population. On the other hand, discrimination against non-IS members and predatory behavior to serve military needs were also characteristics of IS’s health system, resulting in the suffering and death of an unknown number of civilians.

As the military pressure on the group mounted, providing services gave way to mere predation. In the last half year of IS rule, the health system became purely an instrument for IS’s armed forces, leaving the several million inhabitants of the Ninawa province without adequate services. Mosul’s supply lines were blocked, an estimated one third of the doctors fled the city, and hospitals became military targets towards the end of the operation against IS in the spring of 2017. As in any case of rebel governance, it is difficult to measure the impact of rebels’ policies versus outside factors. Nevertheless, in this article I argue that IS’s destructive mix of ideologically motivated micromanagement, lack of overall planning, and predation at the expense of civilians accelerated the demise of the health system and reinforced the public discontent with IS governance more generally.

This article is partly based on 38 interviews with informants who lived in Mosul under IS rule, 15 of which are in-depth interviews with doctors and other hospital staff who worked in Mosul city the entire duration of IS rule in their neighborhoods. The remaining 23 informants
are civilians who were in contact with the health system as patients or relatives of patients, employees in the Mosul doctors’ syndicate, the leader of the health directorate, hospital managers, and members of NGOs who treated civilians from IS-held territories during the liberation of Mosul. Furthermore, the article builds on a comprehensive analysis of propaganda and leaked IS administrative documents from the health sector, complemented by a range of secondary sources. When administrative IS documents from Syria are referred to, this is because they indicate general ambitions for IS’s governance in its territories. Among the informants are general practitioners and specialists in pediatrics, surgery, internal medicine, obstetrics, oncology, hematology and rehabilitation, and all the seven main Mosul hospitals that were under IS rule 2014–2017 are represented. Informants were interviewed between 2016 and 2018 in Northern Iraq or on the phone and social media. Due to the security situation in post-IS Mosul, with an atmosphere of retribution against IS sympathizers, doctors who had worked under IS were wary of being interviewed at the time of my research trips. Most of the interviews were therefore conducted in private homes and informants were selected on the basis of snowball sampling where each informant suggested others. Fear of retribution can potentially influence the answers from local sources. They nevertheless present highly relevant experiences that are necessary to deepen our understanding of IS governance practices. While quotes are attributed to specific individuals, general claims about IS health governance in Mosul are based on the totality of interviews in combination with other sources. All informants are anonymized for their own security, and direct quotes are separated by the letters A through I in this article.

To provide some context for IS rule over Mosul’s health system, I will first briefly present the state of public healthcare in Iraq in June 2014, before outlining IS’s official approach to healthcare in their vision of the state. In the article’s main part, I will detail three central characteristics of IS health services as described by patients and health workers: a rigid religious regime inside hospitals, systematic discrimination against non-IS members, and exploitation of medical personnel. These characteristics highlight how micro-level governance was entangled with clear predatory behavior within one sector of the IS proto-state.

326 The informants worked at Jumhuri, Ibn Sina, al-Battoul, Salam, Ibn Al-Atheer, Al-Khansa hospitals and Mosul General hospital, in addition to smaller clinics and private practices.

327 Interviews are conducted in English or Arabic and translated by the author. For interviews in English, the original phrasing is kept in quotations.
Health as state building in Iraq

The history of healthcare in Iraq in many ways symbolizes the making and unmaking of the modern Iraqi state as a whole. The basis for the country’s public health infrastructure was laid down by the British mandate rulers, guided by a growing belief that better medical services to the civilian population would yield political and economic advantages. During the mandate period and the following 38 years of British-backed monarchy (1920–1958), the health system became a symbol of the modern nation-state, built on Western-oriented science, progress and respect for hierarchy. Following the Ba’th Party’s ascendance to power in 1968, oil nationalization and administrative reforms led to a golden decade in terms of social and medical services, which ranked among the best in the Middle East. The eight-year war with Iran from 1980 had a devastating impact on the country, but at the same time consolidated the state apparatus and led to unprecedented progress in the health sector. In 1990 the downturn began, with the Gulf War and U.S.-led sanctions regime officially designed to cripple Iraq’s military capabilities. Instead it resulted in the degradation of Iraq’s social and material infrastructure. The U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and the ensuing war were a decisive blow to Iraq’s once-respectable health system, leading to mass-scale displacement, extensive damage to hospitals and education, and an unprecedented exodus of health workers. The full long-term health effects of U.S. warfare in Iraq are yet to be documented. Sanctions and war have deeply changed the health ecology by creating multidrug-resistant bacteria that Iraqi authorities will grapple with for decades to come.

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328 Baghdad’s health inspector T. Barrett Heggs wrote in a 1922 report: “All this death, sickness and invalidity means waste. Waste of valuable lives and work to the State, waste of efficiency to the workshops, waste of efforts to the individual and waste or loss of money to all these... Waste is uneconomic; it must be stopped”. As cited in Omar Dewachi, Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 56.


331 Jason H. Calhoun, Clinton K. Murray, and M. M. Manring, "Multidrug-resistant Organisms in Military Wounds from Iraq and Afghanistan," Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research 466, no. 6 (2008). U.S. military doctors have termed Acinetobacter baumannii, one of these superbugs, “Iraqibacter”, see Dewachi, Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq, 179.
Despite its rises and falls of fortune, Iraq’s universal healthcare system, staffed by a proud cadre of medical professionals, has deep roots – precisely because health was an instrumental part of various regimes’ visions of the state. In Mosul at the beginning of 2014, the city’s hospitals were experiencing something of a new spring. Relative calm had led to the return of a number of exiled health workers. The government had boosted the health budgets after more than a decade of neglect.332 Forty-seven primary health care centers and 14 hospitals existed in Mosul at the time of IS’s arrival in the city, and there were a total of 199 primary health centers and 22 hospitals in the Ninawa governorate.333 Iraq’s health system had a lower technical and scientific level than most countries in the region in 2014. However, within Iraq, Mosul was a crucial medical center and Ninawa’s two medical colleges made the governorate an important provider of medical staff. A number of large-scale projects for new health facilities in Ninawa were under way in 2014, but had not yet been inaugurated at the time of IS’s arrival.334 Furthermore, smaller hospitals were being built in Ninawa’s rural population centers. A project for better equipping the existing health facilities was also ongoing, making CT scanning, ultrasound and ECG machines available in primary health centers. A new medical compound with a range of specialized clinics was under construction in West Mosul,335 as well as a privately funded 600-bed hospital. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) in Iraq, not all of them were put into use under IS rule over the city.336 During the military operation against IS, many of these new constructions were ruined or damaged.337

Some level of public healthcare has become an intrinsic part of the social contract between state and citizens in modern states. In states, rulers’ ability or inability to provide healthcare has very direct and visible consequences for civilians’ lives and is often closely linked to a rule’s perceived legitimacy. Research has shown that formal statehood is less decisive for the

335 Specialized units for treating burns, hepatitis, cancer and forensic medicine were among the novelties. Interview with Dr. Firas Ismail Mustafa, medical doctor and Ninawa representative for WHO, conducted on the phone 28.01.2018.
336 Interview with Dr. Firas Ismail Mustafa, medical doctor and Ninawa representative for WHO, conducted on the phone 28.01.2018.
337 As of December 2017, WHO reported that three Ninawa health facilities were fully damaged and 23 partially damaged in the operation. See "Iraq Humanitarian Emergency. Situation Report Issue Number 10, 01-31 December 2017," (World Health Organization, 2017).
effective provision of services than is often presumed. In many weak or fragmented states, service delivery by sub-state entities instead of or alongside the state is the norm rather than the exception. In her broad study of rebel governance between 1950 and 2006, Reyko Huang found that 25 to 35 percent of all rebel groups establish health clinics along with other essential institutions like legislative bodies, police forces and schools. Rebel groups do not need hospitals only to treat wounded soldiers and retain potency on the battleground. They also need to take into account the great symbolic significance of a working health system in order to minimize the risk of popular resistance. Rebel institutions exist because rebels recognize the fact that greater reward can be reaped by the rebel group in the long term if it constrains its behavior today. As Ana Arjona notes, armed groups have incentives to establish institutions because “doing so helps them to both gain territorial control and strengthen their organizational capacity”. This incentive is particularly strong for rebels with long time horizons.

Managing a modern health system is a complex operation, demanding specialized personnel and a constant flow of supplies that can be hard to come by in a war economy. Health services are easily affected by changes in the security level. Studies document the link between insecurity, worse health services and greater risk for healthcare providers. Patients and health workers can be deterred from reaching healthcare facilities; normal communication is disrupted, making outreach campaigns difficult; supply routes are disrupted; and populations are displaced. Added to these challenges are poor sanitation, contaminated water and inadequate shelter, which quickly escalate the effects of a crumbling health system by facilitating the spread of diseases. Health workers in civil wars often find themselves in the line of fire as their services are vital for rebels and civilians alike. In Iraq, doctors also have become targets of organized violence, and are murdered or kidnapped because of their past affiliation with the Ba’ath party or to cause further destabilization. In a 2012 survey 80

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339 Ibid.
341 Weinstein, Inside Rebellion, 168.
342 Arjona, Rebelocracy - Social Order in the Colombian Civil War, 7.
percent of Iraqi doctors reported having been assaulted by a patient or their family members, and 38 percent had been threatened with a gun.  

Despite the context of an ongoing civil war, the Islamic State had a relatively solid starting point for providing health services to the population after the group’s takeover of Mosul on 10 June 2014. The city had the most sophisticated hospitals of all IS-held areas, and a large number of educated medical staff remained even after an initial brain drain in 2014. In addition, an unknown number of foreign fighters arrived to work as health staff. Most salaries were being paid by the central government until the summer of 2015. Although hospitals were cut off from contact with Baghdad in March 2015, many of their services were self-sufficient. IS had better economic means than most other rebel groups, as well as more continuous territorial control, which provided a degree of stability needed for efficient service delivery. Despite these resources at the group’s disposal, the next section will demonstrate how the health system was among the least successful of IS state-building endeavors.

“Serving the Muslim populace” – health in IS material

According to IS propaganda, its dīwān as-ṣīḥa, health ministry was responsible for “developing the health sector, and providing any means essential for preventing and treating sickness and disease”. IS specifically urged doctors and medical students to migrate to Islamic State–held territories, underlining that migration is mandatory for Muslims who have skills needed in the “caliphate”. In a document issued in Ninawa, IS gave a “final warning” to medical personnel, pharmacists, and teachers of medicine and nursing who had fled the area. Those who did not return within 30 days would have their property confiscated. A clause left the door open for health personnel to repent if they did return. IS mentioned the plight of civilians, especially children, on several occasions in propaganda videos on health. One video, describing the so-called ISHS, Islamic State Health Services, gave virtual tour of an IS-run hospital, including departments for newborn and pediatric care. In one scene, the now-infamous Australian IS doctor Tareq Kamleh showed the empty bed of a severely injured

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347 The Islamic State, “The Structure of the Khilafa”, video, July 2016, https://videopress.com/v/16QF5r
349 The Islamic State, announcement, Ninawa, 2015, Specimen 5I in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s online archive of IS administrative documents (from here on shortened to AJTA): http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.
girl who had been shown in a previous scene. “Unfortunately, this girl died because of the kuffār bombs. We need you in the caliphate. What are you waiting for?” he asked, turning towards the camera. Boasting of healthcare that has no immediate military function could, in theory, indicate that IS seeks to legitimize its rule vis-à-vis the local civilian population. However, these messages were primarily addressed to potential new recruits and foreign fighters. The plight of civilians was presented as an argument for emigrating to the Islamic State, where meaningful job opportunities allegedly abounded in the modern hospitals and clinics of the “caliphate”. While IS material on education directly addresses civilians and urges locals to enroll their children in IS-run schools, there is little effort to directly advertise the health system to the inhabitants of the “caliphate”.

Administrative documents for use in the territories are likely to give a more untainted picture of IS’s priorities on the ground than propaganda tailor-made for recruitment. IS produced a large quantity of administrative documents related to health in its various provinces or wilāyāt. This include public announcements, medical reports for IS members, travel permits for medical reasons, fatwas, birth certificates and vaccination cards for children. Some public declarations refer to the needs of civilians as a motivation for a strong health sector. Doctors are called upon to “serve the Muslim populace”; exiled doctors are threatened to either return or have their property confiscated. Administrative documents, often mimicking Iraqi regime documents, most often give the impression of a streamlined, accountable and universal health system. On the ground, however, IS did no real effort to promote this image in their interaction with civilians. In the following sections, I will detail three central characteristics of IS health services as described by patients and health workers: a rigid religious regime inside hospitals, systematic discrimination against non-IS members,

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and exploitation of medical personnel. These characteristics highlight how micro-level governance was entangled with clear predatory behavior within IS-run health institutions.

**Governance and predation in the health sector**

“Let her die and God is responsible”

The most estranging aspect of IS health care in Mosul in the eyes of my informants was the rigid implementation of gender segregation and clothing rules that sometimes cost Mosul’s inhabitants their lives. Although Mosul is a relatively conservative Sunni Muslim-majority city, its inhabitants describe the rules imposed by IS as extreme and foreign. All direct contact between female employees or patients and male employees or patients was banned. IS rules for *shari’a* attire applied to medical staff like everyone else: Females had to perform their tasks wearing a two-layered cloak, *‘abāya*, thick gloves and full face-veils covering the eyes. Males had to wear ankle-length trousers and keep their beard long and their hair short. These rules disproportionally affected female staff because they severely hampered their movement and examination of patients. Women had to be transported to work by a male family member. When a female doctor was seen talking with a male colleague, her father or husband would receive a warning and sometimes be punished with lashes. The constant bickering by patrolling groups of IS morality police, *al-hisba*, about their clothes led many female employees to stay at home because they felt unable to do their work properly. This resulted in a severe shortage of female doctors, who were already underrepresented in the hospitals. This in turn affected female patients because they could only be treated by women. A female doctor described the psychological stress and the physical limitations created by the clothing regime:

> It affected our work very much, the first month I could hardly breathe, and we could not see anything through the veil, we could not sew [the wound of] a patient well. […] Sometimes the things they said were very painful. Like you are an immoral woman trying to excite men, not just a doctor trying to make a schedule for your work.

Although men and women were allowed to work in the same place, all communication between them was banned, and they were not allowed to be alone together. In some hospitals,

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358 Interview with doctor F in a Mosul hospital, conducted on the phone 05.06.2018.
female and male staff had separate workdays. The segregation created a range of obstacles to efficient treatment: A male doctor would not be allowed to ask a mother about her child’s medical background and condition. A female doctor could not report to a male colleague about the current state of the patients when her shift ended. A male hospital manager could not issue direct instructions to a female staff member about how to prioritize patients. In pediatric wards, child patients were frightened by the fully veiled nurses and doctors and could not easily identify their female family members. Two male doctors described how these rules overshadowed the tasks they were set to do, in a context where they were already overworked because of the lack of staff:

Because of the black masks – we called it the mask of Zorro – I did not even recognize many of my colleagues […]. We could not communicate, not even stand for a few seconds together. When handing over a patient, I could not say anything, so I tried to write it down on a note and pass it secretly to my colleague. We lost the joy of work; we just did what we had to, without interest, and then returned home.  

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When I am working to prepare a report about a critical case, for example leukemia, it is a very stressful situation for me as a doctor to make decisions about the patient. And then they come and ask me “Why did you not shorten your trousers? Why did you shorten your beard?” This made me very angry, and many times I would go home to try to calm down, and then go back to write the report.

IS gradually moved childbirth and obstetrics to a designated women’s hospital, al-Battoul hospital in West Mosul. The employees there reported more freedom as they were working in all-women zones. However, this hospital lacked the capacity to cater for the needs of the entire female population, and its services were prioritized for IS members’ wives, according to my interviewees. The rules for clothing and segregation were identical for private and public clinics and medical practices across Mosul. A male doctor in a public clinic recounted:

I am the only surgeon in my center, so I had to reject all female patients who needed surgery. […] The woman would return to her home without treatment, unless we managed to direct her elsewhere. This

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359 Interview with doctor A in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Mosul 20.04.18.
360 Interview with doctor B in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Mosul 25.04.18.
361 Interviewees who spent time in al-Battoul hospital reported that Yezidi girls held captive as IS sex slaves were also taken to al-Battoul for treatment.
was very strange for us. Usually there are female doctors all over Mosul treating male patients and vice versa.\textsuperscript{362}

In a “fatwa”, religious ruling, IS allowed for women to be treated by a man if no female doctor was available.\textsuperscript{363} While on some reported occasions IS lifted the segregation rules,\textsuperscript{364} overall they were strictly enforced regardless of the seriousness of the patient’s condition. Waiting for many hours with severe pain when treatment and doctors were available was something that contributed strongly to alienating civilians towards their new rulers. A patient described his experience at the entrance of the hospital guarded by IS members:

I had a gout attack under IS, they had to take an x-ray of my foot. At that time, the male doctor was missing. The so-called hisba did not let a female doctor examine my foot, so I had to wait. […] I said it was very painful, I needed an examination as soon as possible. He said it is not possible. This is something not related to religion. It is in Islam that a male patient is preferred to be examined by a male doctor. But it can be critical and a matter of life or death. For me it wasn’t, but what if? For us this is completely weird and out of this planet.\textsuperscript{365}

With a civilian population suffering from mounting airstrikes against IS targets, the segregation rules increasingly did become a matter of life and death. It was officially stated in an IS announcement that the military campaign was no excuse for disregarding the clothing rules.\textsuperscript{366} If a female patient was brought to an emergency room, it was not uncommon for her to be sent away or left to die because there were no available female doctors or surgeons. If a female patient was not wearing the appropriate clothes or shoes, she would often be sent away to get new ones regardless of how critical her condition was. A male doctor described his feeling of helplessness in such situations:

I could not measure a woman's blood pressure because she could not uncover her arm. One time a teenage girl, about 16 years old, was brought to the emergency room after an airstrike. I rushed to treat her, and [IS] stopped me. I argued that I wanted to save her life, they said that I was not allowed because I was a man and there were no female doctors present. I said that she might die, they replied "Let her die in peace and God will be responsible". This girl died, every time I think about it I want to

\textsuperscript{362} Interview with doctor C in a Mosul clinic, conducted on the phone, 14.02.18.


\textsuperscript{364} See for example Cunningham, "Islamic State imposes a reign of fear in Iraqi hospitals."

\textsuperscript{365} Interview with a former patient in a Mosul hospital, conducted on the phone, 03.01.18.

\textsuperscript{366} The Islamic State, announcement, Mosul, August 2015, https://jihadology.net/2016/12/31/the-archivist-unseen-islamic-state-regulations-for-the-mosul-operations/
Because of the constant surveillance inside the hospitals, there are few signs of organized resistance against IS within the health sector. There are some accounts among my informants of doctors trying to work around IS restrictions in order to treat civilians. A few anecdotal examples of open resistance to the segregation rules are recorded in news media. On other occasions, doctors were killed for refusing to follow orders, according to some reports. My interviewees reported several incidents of corporal punishment when doctors refused to treat wounded IS soldiers at the expense of civilians, a policy that will be described in the next section.

“Ikhwa or ‘awwāma?”

To my knowledge, no available official IS document stipulated that the group’s members be prioritized in health institutions under their control. This was nevertheless the unwritten rule in all hospitals in Mosul, including pediatric hospitals, where IS soldiers’ children were prioritized over other children regardless of their condition. Both IS fighters and those who pledged a so-called civilian allegiance to IS – a declaration of support without having a military role – were given priority over other civilians. The medical staff members who joined IS were sometimes, but not always, easily distinguishable from their colleagues, as they gained some visible advantages, as outlined below.

The discrimination between IS members and non-members took various forms. The most overt form was IS members or their families being allowed to skip the hospital queue and, protected by IS guards, demand immediate treatment. The IS guards would often ask if the patient was an “ikhwa”, a “brother”, meaning IS member, or “‘awwāma”, “regular folks”, the term they used for civilians, in order to prioritize the “brothers” and their families. This would often create disputes between the local doctors and IS guards, as some doctors would insist on treating people according to the urgency of their case. IS redeployed some of the administrative staff in hospitals to act as intermediaries in disputes, which could get violent.

367 Interview with doctor D in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Erbil, 19.04.18.
369 See for example David Harris, "Islamic StateExecutes Women & Doctors in 'Collaborators' Purge," Clarion Project, 7 September 2014.; Rudaw, "Sources: ISIS executed 10 doctors in Mosul for refusing to treat wounded fighters " Rudaw, 27 January 2015.
370 For simplicity, I here use the term "IS members" for both these groups.
After the IS takeover, many of the administrative staff members had become redundant as the bureaucracy shrunk. The down-sizing of the bureaucracy was partly initiated by IS, and partly a result of the isolation of the city from the Iraqi state apparatus, which meant that some employees no longer had any tasks. One of these redundant staff members deployed as an intermediary described a kind of scene that would often recur between doctors and IS members:

Sometimes they started arguing and then I had to solve it. Sometimes it escalated to weapons. For example, one child was brought to the hospital but he was already dead by the time he came. So the parent, a Chechen foreign fighter, blamed the doctor for the child's death and he pulled a gun on him and knocked the gun on his head.371

If a dispute escalated and drew a lot of attention, it was sometimes settled in the doctor’s favor. Often, however, the doctor would be rebuked if he argued against IS or refused to prioritize IS members.

A more subtle form of discrimination was withholding medicines from civilians while they were available in separate storage rooms or field hospitals for IS members. The separate storage rooms were well known because they were used by doctors when they treated IS members. Some local doctors were also sent to the front lines to treat wounded IS soldiers with makeshift “clinics”. The lack of medicines and supplies became noticeable during the second year of IS rule, when the government storage facilities were running low on supplies. Doctors and patients report that new drug brands from Syria started appearing in the pharmacies, indicating that IS imported medicines via the open road between Raqqa and Mosul until the last six months of IS occupation of Mosul.372 These medicines were sold in pharmacies or sometimes directly from Syrian-registered trucks. However, they were too expensive for most civilians, many of whom had their salaries cut and were surviving on savings or help from relatives. While the medicines were free for IS members, the price for civilians could be up to five times the regular price. Added to this were the new fees imposed by IS on civilians for all services including cancer treatment and childbirth, a break with the long history of publicly financed healthcare in Iraq. IS gradually charged for more services in order to finance the hospitals after salaries stopped and medicines became scarce. As the

371 Interview with administrative employee in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Mosul 24.04.18.
372 IS specifically banned importing medicines from Iran, Specimen 4x in AJTA, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents
group’s finances were increasingly channeled to military spending, the health sector became more self-financed, depending on civilians’ payment. The money collected from patients was spent on providing a minimum of services and salaries for hospital staff. The salaries were only a fraction of those before IS, and barely covered travel expenses. The skyrocketing prices for healthcare were the main concern among civilians. According to my interviews, in the last year of IS rule in Mosul, medical treatment had become a luxury that only the few who still had savings could afford. Even civilians who could afford it were denied treatment if medical staff was told to prioritize the “brothers”. During the last months of the liberation battle, medical services were almost exclusively reserved for wounded fighters and their families.

_Al-ikhwa_ and their families had their own, exclusive supply line for medication, which was well known and highly institutionalized. When an IS member or his family needed a drug, including expensive and rare medicines, they got a permission letter from a doctor or from the _dīwān al-ṣīḥḥa_, the IS “health ministry” in Mosul, that granted them the right to free medication from the hospital storage rooms. Alternatively, they could go to the “Brothers’ pharmacy”, an IS-only pharmacy set up in the Ibn Sina hospital. In addition to using the government stores of medicines and those imported from Syria, IS acquired a large portion of their medicine supplies by looting pharmacies that belonged to people who had fled the city. The group practiced tight control on pharmacies and unauthorized drug sales were strictly forbidden. Medicines could only be sold by authorized pharmacists. In Syria, the group distributed its own rudimentary test on basic pharmaceutical knowledge that they demanded pharmacists take. In a letter addressing pharmacists of Mosul, IS blamed them for what they called “minor increase in prices” for medicines. A “spirit of love and cooperation among the Muslim populace” was encouraged to ensure reasonably priced medicines for civilians with chronic diseases. The letter stipulated the allowed profit for various price groups.

This stands in stark contrast to realities reported by patients and doctors in my study. They report skyrocketing prices in pharmacies controlled by IS and medicines for the chronically ill being prioritized for IS members. One doctor recounted:

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374 The Islamic State, announcement, Mosul, Specimen C in AJTA, http://www.aymennjawad.org/15952/aspects-of-islamic-state-is-administration-in
We had a very expensive drug that would usually be imported from Germany [...], it cost 3,000 dollars. It is only supplied by the government because it is too expensive for normal people. After IS occupation, we would send a patient to them who needed that drug, because they controlled the drug stores. They told us they did not have it. The next day, one of their brothers needed the same, and he got a paper from the dīwān al-ṣīḥḥa, he went to the storage and he got it. [...] We reached a point where the medical staff collected money from each other to give to a patient who needed it to buy drugs.375

A third form of discrimination was the stricter enforcement of dress codes and segregation for civilians than for IS patients. Officially, gender segregation and clothing rules were universal and absolute, and were deemed more important than civilians’ lives, as described above. During the treatment of an IS member, these rules were sometimes flouted. A female doctor recounted her experience of the different practices:

The clothes restricted our movements. If I want to enter a needle in the back of a baby, I want to see the area clearly. With the cover on my face, I don't see anything clearly. I asked them to please let me uncover at least my eyes, because I risked paralyzing the patient. I asked, what if I was treating an IS soldier, do I also put the needle in his body blindly? They said no, then you can uncover your eyes. I said "No, this patient is the same as that patient", but they didn’t listen.376

Lastly, during most of IS rule over Mosul, civilians were not allowed to leave the city to get necessary treatment, even for life-threatening conditions. IS members, on the other hand, would regularly be transferred to other parts of the “caliphate” and even to high-quality hospitals in Turkey if the treatment was not available in Mosul.377 A fatwa was issued by IS declaring that travelling to dār al-kafr [the abode of the infidels] was permitted if it was necessary for health reasons.378 There are examples of civilians in Mosul obtaining such permission during the first year under IS. As the military struggle intensified, this became an option often reserved for IS members. An unknown number of civilian children and chronically ill patients died because of these policies. A man in Mosul told of how his grandson was denied permission to travel for lifesaving treatment:

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375 Interview with doctor F in a Mosul hospital, conducted on the phone 05.06.2018.
376 Interview with doctor E in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Erbil 19.04.18.
377 A written travel permission was issued on such occasions. For an example of medical travel permissions in Syria see The Islamic State, “Sending Someone to the Western wilāyāts for Medical treatment”, November 2016, Specimen 40S in Tamimi’s online archive, , http://www.aymennjawad.org/2017/08/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3
My grandson had a chronic illness and he needed some special medicine. [...] The medicine was not available under IS. I tried to get the medicines from outside, but it was impossible. He stayed three months in the hospital in Mosul. IS told us to pay 5,000 IQD per day, but I did not have any money because I did not get my salary. A doctor helped me secretly and transferred my grandson to intensive care, which was free. But he got sicker, and I kidnapped him from the bed and left Mosul. We managed to escape to Erbil, but my grandson died after a month.\textsuperscript{379}

Similar stories were common among my patient-informants.\textsuperscript{380} As the blockade on Mosul began to suffocate the supply of food and money from the outside, the mortality rate started rising among patients. Patients with weakened immune systems were most vulnerable to the lack of food, and the sporadic supply of electricity made the hospitals unable to run lifesaving equipment. Children and old people suffered disproportionally from the lack of both medicines and food. IS often used the civilians’ medical needs as a means to pressure civilians into joining them or sending one of their sons to fight for them. A staff member in a children’s ward recounted:

The most difficult was to see children die of leukemia because they did not receive the necessary treatment. [...] I know that they died because of dāʾish because dāʾish had chemotherapy medicines, and they would be given to dāʾish people who had a sick child who brought a permission from dīwān al-sībḥa, and that child would live. Some people joined dāʾish just to get medicine for their children. Other people made the decision to let their child die rather than join dāʾish.\textsuperscript{381}

Managing health personnel

While exact numbers are difficult to establish, my interviewees estimate that one third of their colleagues disappeared from work during the first few months of the IS occupation. After IS closed the city borders, crossing them was only possible with the help of smugglers. This was both costly and risky, so many were forced to stay in the city for the entire duration of IS rule. Among the doctors who remained, a number stayed in hiding for the entire period under IS. Medical staff were a valuable asset for IS, and IS members would routinely come to doctors’ homes and pick them up by car if they failed to show up for work. Administrative employees in the hospitals were deployed by the group to register all absentees. In some instances, IS

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{379} Interview with civilian from Mosul, conducted in Erbil 03.11.16.
\textsuperscript{380} See also “dāʾish tuḥāṣir mustashfayāt al-mosul ("IS besieges Mosul hospitals"),” \textit{Al-Araby}, 26 September 2014.
\textsuperscript{381} Interview with administrative manager under IS in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Mosul 24.04.2018.
\end{flushright}
would also send young scouts around to doctors’ offices to report any absence. An atmosphere of fear and suspicion took over the workplaces. Staff members not only had to stay on the alert towards the newly installed IS-run management and the roaming IS police patrols, but also towards some of their colleagues who had joined IS. My informants estimate that up to five percent of the existing hospital staff joined IS upon the group’s arrival in the city, with small variations between the hospitals. Here as well, exact numbers are difficult to confirm, but it is beyond doubt that a number of local doctors and medical staff members did pledge allegiance to IS. My doctor informants told of their own surprise when they saw longtime colleagues join the extremists’ ranks. One doctor recounted:

The sector where I least expected to see people joining dāʿish, pledging a civilian allegiance, was the health sector. I could not believe my own eyes when I saw that some of them had joined. […] One doctor was very wealthy. […] His family was living the high life, I could not understand why he would join. He appeared in a dāʿish propaganda video. […] A doctor I know was in his last year of specialization in surgery; he left his specialization to go with dāʿish. I talked to some of them and asked why; some would not give a straight answer. Some joined them, and maybe regretted later; as soon as you had joined there was no way back, you would be killed. Some of the doctors had family members killed by the Iraqi army, or had been arrested or tortured, and they wanted revenge. Some were kicked out of Baghdad in 2004 because they were Sunni. Each person had his or her reason to support dāʿish.382

Doctors who joined IS did get some advantages compared to other doctors, such as the occasional promotion and more lenient treatment by the IS police. However, as locals they were still ranked below the foreign fighter doctors. Most of the pro-IS doctors and medical staff were arrested or killed during the liberation of Mosul.

IS changed the composition of the hospital staff in several ways. In the largest hospitals, administrative directors were replaced with IS members or doctors who had recently joined IS. Usually, medical management positions were occupied by the same locals as before the IS occupation, although some directors and doctors were redeployed at other hospitals than their original workplace. Because IS members were favored for important positions, these sometimes ended up being filled by inexperienced people. IS members who lacked the necessary education and training were hired as doctors, nurses and managers. An informant reported that IS put a former gasoline seller in charge of the emergency department in one

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382 Interview with doctor H in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Mosul 21.04.18.
hospital, while a foreign fighter with only two years of education was hired as a dentist. However, the bulk of the staff in the hospitals was still locals who had not pledged allegiance to IS. They were shuffled between hospitals at IS’s will, as the group prioritized the largest hospitals in Mosul as well as certain smaller hospitals near the frontlines, like Qayyara. Some female doctors were moved to al-Battoul women’s hospital in keeping with the group’s segregation policies.

IS’s attitude towards doctors was two-faced. On the one hand, doctors were invaluable assets to the group and were treated less harshly than other civilians were. Killing a doctor was something of a “red line”, according to the doctors interviewed in this study. Doctors were routinely threatened with execution if they did not show up for work, but there are no examples in my material of such threats being carried through. When disputes happened between local doctors and IS members, the group’s seniors made an effort to resolve them without antagonizing the doctors. IS was dependent on their goodwill in order to keep a sufficient number of them working. On the other hand, doctors were more exposed to risk than many other civilians because they were working alongside IS members in locations used as headquarters. With less than half of the staff remaining, and many wounded civilians and fighters incoming due to airstrikes, the working conditions for medical staff deteriorated significantly under IS. In the most intense periods, up to eight times the normal number of patients would come in, according to my interviews. 24-hour shifts were not uncommon, and IS would routinely punish doctors who had skipped work by forcing them to stay working in the hospital for weeks without returning home. As the coalition forces drew closer, many doctors became de facto hostages in the hospitals because they were not allowed to leave for the liberated areas. In addition to the excessive workload, the medical staff worked practically without payment during the majority of IS rule.

According to the doctors interviewed for this study, IS did not introduce new work plans during their rule, but in practice relied on existing frameworks put in place by the Iraqi health authorities. The group advertised hospitals refurbished by the regime prior to 2014 as their own “new IS hospitals”. In reality, the group’s will or capacity for innovation in running the...
health facilities was almost non-existent; in most cases its rule represented instead a reduction of the services available prior to 2014. The group cut the required training time for medical students in order to keep the supply of new medical staff flowing, and often hired poorly trained foreign fighters as medical staff.

Vaccination of children serves as an example of IS’s indifference to parts of the health system that were primarily for civilians’ benefit. Before 2014, an extensive vaccination program was in place in Ninawa that made vaccinations universally available in rural and urban areas. This kept running for about six months after the IS takeover, but came to a halt because importing vaccines and employing doctors to implement these programs were not prioritized by IS. BCG and measles vaccines were not available; polio and hepatitis were only in limited supply. IS’s neglect of vaccination programs in Iraq has resulted in the return of previously uncommon diseases in the country. Doctors report an explosion of measles, scabies and other communicable diseases such as meningitis. One Mosul doctor working with prevention and protection against communicable diseases lamented the lack of guidelines under IS:

The guidelines from the ministry remained the same; dāʿiṣh did not have their own guidelines. They did not have any plans, nothing, it was just random. They did not have any humanitarian or scientific rules to work by. It depended on the dāʿiṣḥi [IS member], whatever he feels like at that time becomes the rule. We were shocked about what was going on. Usually, if someone suffers from a communicable disease, we put them in isolation units, take tests, send them to Baghdad and get a quick answer. Under dāʿiṣh we could not do that, we were completely dependent on ourselves. This, of course, affected our work severely. Dāʿiṣh did not have any program or policy on communicable diseases; we tried to keep working with the old system but it was very limited what we managed to do. We did our best to overcome the limitations, by way of teamwork.

The old health directorate of Mosul remained open, with its staff reduced to a handful of employees. According to my interviewees, this was a general tendency throughout the IS administration of Mosul. Public offices and directorates that were deemed superfluous by IS were cut to a minimum or shut down.

Administrative IS records from Syria indicate an IS-run vaccination program for children, see for example The Islamic State, “Vaccination schedule for children”, specimen 1M in Tamimi’s online archive, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents. However, as Tamimi has pointed out, these were a copy of the government run programs. The actual implementation of this program is uncertain.

Interview with doctor I in a Mosul hospital, conducted in Mosul 26.04.18.
Because of Mosul’s relatively well-developed health infrastructure, Mosul became the main medical hub for IS throughout their territories. New laboratory equipment from Mosul medical college was transferred to the group’s new medical school in Raqqa, according to the IS newsletter al-Naba’. At the time of the IS takeover, Al-Jumhuri hospital in West Mosul was known to be one of the top surgical hospitals in Iraq, and its operating theatres had recently gone through a costly modernization. It soon became the center for treatment of wounded IS soldiers, and fighters were brought there from all across IS-held territory. Civilians started associating the hospital with IS, and because of this, many tried to avoid seeking treatment there. Similarly, local doctors tried to avoid being assigned there by IS because it would make them more open to accusations of collaborating with IS. Because the hospital was essential for treating IS soldiers, it was strictly prioritized at the expense of civilians, with patients being screened by IS guards at the hospital entrance. Similarly, because of its military importance, Jumhuri was the destination for many of the foreign doctors and medical personnel who came from abroad to work for IS. My informants pointed out the friction between the local doctors and the foreign fighters who had become their colleagues.

We were suffering from the IS doctors from Russia, Tunisia, and Morocco. They were very extreme in their views. [...] When I was working alongside them, I had to agree with everything they said; they intervened in my work.

Jumhuri became the group’s most important administrative center for healthcare. The dīwān al-ṣīḥḥa was located on the lower floors of Jumhuri hospital and was responsible for administering hospitals, field hospitals and distribution of medicines. It is well documented that IS used medical facilities as military bases, effectively using the patients and doctors as human shields because they considered hospitals to be safer from air bombardment than purely military targets. A public announcement banned gatherings in front of hospitals during the military operation, in an attempt to divert attention away from these de facto military bases. As the coalition against IS closed in on the group and reclaimed East Mosul, Jumhuri hospital became even more important as a sniper position, as it was located on a hill on the

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387 The Islamic State, “al-Naba’”, nr 18, s 12.
388 Interview with doctor G in Jumhuri hospital, conducted in Mosul 23.04.18.
389 There were also local branches of dīwān as-ṣīḥḥa in other provinces of Iraq and Syria.
390 The Islamic State, announcement, Mosul, October 2016, https://jihadology.net/2016/12/31/the-archivist-unseen-islamic-state-regulations-for-the-mosul-operations/
west bank of the Tigris. Those of my informants who spent time in Jumhuri hospital confirm
other reports that the hospital’s basement was used for weapon storage and ambulances were
used to transfer weaponry. The mixed civilian-military nature of the hospital did not keep it
from being bombed, and it was completely destroyed by airstrikes in the final days of the
military operation against IS in July 2017.

Discussion and conclusion

The tension between IS’s ideology, its ongoing military campaign, and its ambitions to
provide public services became clear in the group’s administration of Mosul’s health system.
In certain realms of its “state” apparatus, IS showed a surprising level of innovation and at
times a capacity to run complex institutions. The group’s overhaul of the education system
involved the writing of more than 60 new schoolbooks with unique content, demonstrating an
ambitious long-term planning horizon, even though it was not implemented as planned.391 Its
security apparatus was the backbone of its state project, cleverly combining the Saddam era’s
surveillance and policing strategies with a near total control of communication channels.392
The health system, however, is an example of the opposite. It is to a large extent what
Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi in his analysis of IS has called “parasitic co-optation”393 – preying
on the resources already present in the territories, relying on existing medicine stocks and
salaries still being paid by the central government, while merely rebranding the institutions as
IS’s own.

In this sense, the health system represents a clearer case of predatory rebel rule than other
parts of the IS administration. Predatory rebels may give the impression of running
institutions by changing key positions, names, and administrative documents. However, as
William Reno notes, such measures are intended to “achieve outside recognition, not serve
local inhabitants”.394 IS presented its health system as a modern, innovative and well-
functioning part of its new “state”, offering universal services. In reality, existing plans for
crucial health functions were ignored. Planning, organizing and innovation were practically
non-existent, and the group preyed on the available resources in an way that proved to

391 See Mathilde Becker Aarseth, “Resistance in the Caliphate’s Classrooms: Mosul Civilians vs IS,” Middle East
392 Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, “The ISIS Emni: The Origins and Inner Workings of ISIS’s Intelligence
Jawad Al-Tamimi blog, 17 January 2015.
unsustainable. IS’s management style caused many civilians’ deaths and led to the alienation of healthcare personnel. This undoubtedly increased the number of doctors who fled the territory, thereby further draining the health system of human resources crucial for both IS and civilians. IS members were given preferential treatment, which, although it can serve boost the internal morale and create incentives for new recruits to join, undermined the public’s support for IS’s governance more generally.

IS’s predatory behavior indicates a short time horizon in which immediate military gains trumped the long-term interests of both civilians and IS itself. Interestingly, this predatory behavior was combined with a strong fixation on ideology, to a point where it interfered not only with the treatment of civilians but also with the treatment of fighters, whom the IS health system was geared to serve. The fact that IS provided some level of healthcare to civilians and actively used hospitals as spaces for ideological indoctrination of the population indicates a long time horizon. In conventional “new civil war” literature, modern civil wars are often described as purely criminal, predatory and depoliticized. IS’s entire project can hardly be dismissed as a purely predatory endeavor. Instead, the findings presented in this article demonstrate how rebels’ predatory practices can coexist with ambitions for substantial, long-term governance. The case of Mosul’s health system under IS serves to highlight the complexity in rebels’ approaches to civilian institutions.

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Article 3:

Islamic State Policing in Mosul

Perceptions of legitimacy among civilians

Introduction

The brutality of the Islamic State’s police branches in Iraq and Syria became a much-broadcast symbol of the group’s ruthless methods for civilian control between 2014 and 2017. For more than 1.2 million civilians who suddenly became inhabitants of the group’s “caliphate”, the IS police forces were the most prominent face of the new regime in their streets, their workplaces and their homes, and arguably the part of the IS administration with which civilians experienced most direct contact. It is not unusual that rebels with ambitions to govern civilians establish their own law enforcement,\(^{396}\) nor that civilians report crimes to rebels in the absence of better alternatives.\(^{397}\) Controlling small-scale violence is important because small violent actors can develop the capacity to challenge the state’s existence or disrupt vital functions like taxation.\(^{398}\) Furthermore, by advertising policing as a service to the population, the rebels effectively boost their claim as an alternative state authority. The IS police apparatus is part of the group’s larger justice system, including its laws, courts and prisons.\(^{399}\) I have chosen policing as a gauge for Maslawis’ perception of IS legitimacy for two main reasons. First, the active role of police in people’s everyday lives under IS provides ample opportunity to gather rich interview data. Second, the IS police was not merely relegated to bringing offenders to court. IS charged its new police branches – manned by

\(^{396}\)Arjona et al., Rebel Governance in Civil War, 287.

\(^{397}\)It is worth noting that rebel groups do not always operate with a clear distinction between military and police officers.


\(^{399}\)For an outline of IS legal systems see Revkin, ”The legal foundations of the Islamic State “.
local, national or foreign members of IS\textsuperscript{400} – with an array of tasks reaching far beyond the ideal of police as an impartial upholder of order separate from the courts. According to the group’s understanding of Islamic law, the police had authority to issue certain rulings independent of a judge in accordance with shari’a and the “interest of the people”, as will be detailed in the next section. Thus, civilians’ perceptions of the IS police can provide valuable insight into how the group’s legitimacy was perceived more generally. On the one hand, a professional police force is a sign of successful institution building, because it requires that arbitrariness and clientelism be replaced by meritocratic and bureaucratic procedures. On the other hand, if a rebel group abuses its monopoly on violence and displays a lack of accountability, the result can be a public backlash against it.

Qualitative investigations of civilians’ perception of IS governance in general, and more specifically its law enforcement, are lacking. This is partly due to the security challenges in accessing previously IS-held areas. In several research and media reports, IS police branches have been depicted as a somewhat positive force that provided long-needed stability, predictability and order in war zones; this has sometimes been described as outweighing the public’s discontent with the group’s harsh rulings.\textsuperscript{401} However, such conclusions often rely on anecdotal evidence and not comprehensive interview-based studies. Moreover, many accounts are from Syria, even though Mosul was by far the largest laboratory for IS state-building efforts.

This article is based on 39 in-depth interviews with civilians who lived in Mosul under IS rule, most of which were conducted on two research trips to Northern Iraq in November–December 2016 and April–May 2018. The article also draws on additional interviews conducted on the phone and social media. The context of civil war raises methodological as well as ethical issues. Many of the interviews were conducted at a time of brutal crackdowns by Iraqi forces on suspected IS sympathizers. There was a possibility that Maslawis (inhabitants of Mosul) might be downplaying any possible sympathy with IS’s governance practices. Interviews were conducted in private settings in an effort to minimize the risk of

\textsuperscript{400} For simplicity, I use the term «IS member» to describe militants, including foreign fighters and their families, and those who made a civilian pledge of allegiance to the group. The term “civilian” is used to describe inhabitants of Mosul who did not pledge allegiance to the group.

self-censorship. Names and contextual information are removed for the interviewees’ own security. Because of the security situation, I did not have complete freedom of movement to seek out interviewees. Nevertheless, by doing street interviews in Mosul and tracking down relevant interviewees in camps, I managed to gather data from a range of different neighborhoods and socio-economic groups, in an attempt to capture some of the variety in people’s experiences. Of these individuals, 19 were interviewed in Mosul, and had stayed in Mosul the whole duration of IS rule; 30 were interviewed in Iraqi camps for internally displaced people.402 The interviewees are from 16 different neighborhoods in eastern and western Mosul and experienced between four months and three years of IS rule. The neighborhoods include areas that were known to be IS strongholds like 17 Tamuz and the Old City; areas that historically have housed many officers in the Iraqi security forces, like Wadi Hajar; central middle-class areas like Muhandeseen; and lower-class suburbs like al-Zahraa. My interviewees were chosen on the basis of their original neighborhood and the period of time spent under IS occupation. In my experience, interviewees were not hesitant about describing positive aspects of IS governance or lamenting the corruption and inefficiency of the Iraqi police forces.

In addition, the article is based on IS administrative documents, propaganda, and a wide range of secondary sources.403 Places and dates of origin are reported when these are included in documents. I have also chosen to include several administrative documents from Syrian areas under IS control because, according to the group’s files, structures and guidelines should be universally enforced in all its provinces.404 Therefore, many documents are not assigned to a specific wilāya or province. This is not to say that the implementation of the group’s blueprint for governance was in fact similar in all its provinces, but this was the image it tried to project in its propaganda. A thorough comparative examination of the geographical variations in IS governance is beyond the scope of this article, but is an important avenue for future research. Since the provinces in Iraq and Syria were the core of IS governance efforts, documents that

402 Interviews for this article were conducted in Debaga, Khazer and Hasan Sham IDP camps in territories controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government.
403 Administrative documents are taken from Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s extensive archive of leaked IS documents (from here on shortened to AJTA), my own interviewees, and other trusted online sources.
specifically refer to areas outside of these are not included, although various forms of IS police forces have been set up in Libya\textsuperscript{405} and to a lesser extent in Sinai, Egypt.\textsuperscript{406}

After a brief description of IS’s official vision of its police forces and their composition, the article will assess Mosul civilians’ perception of these forces’ legitimacy along three axes: efficiency, accountability and predictability, placed in the context of a country with notoriously low public trust in security institutions.\textsuperscript{407} Efficiency and accountability are at the center of existing discussions on police legitimacy.\textsuperscript{408} Predictability is included as a separate axis because it was emphasized by many of my interviewees as an important aspect of policing. As we will see, these three indicators of perceived legitimacy are overlapping and interconnected. Importantly, the use of the term “legitimacy” here does not imply a clear boundary between legitimate and non-legitimate regimes, or that legitimacy is achieved by fulfilling a number of normative criteria. Instead, this study serves to highlight the fluidity of power relations and legitimacy. A regime is legitimate when it is acknowledged as so by those involved in a power relation, but a degree of legitimacy does not mean that a regime fulfills all the standards that members of the subject population would wish for.\textsuperscript{409} The striking variety in perceptions of the IS police presented here underline the risk of conflating IS’s formal structures with realities perceived by civilians. The picture that emerges from my sources is far from the streamlined and accountable police force depicted in the group’s own propaganda and some of its internal documents. While many civilians show a level of appreciation of some parts of the group’s policing, the majority describe a sense of great unpredictability and lack of accountability under IS rule, also as compared to the situation before June 2014.

“Servants of the Caliph”

The police forces play a central role in what can be seen as IS’s “social contract”, obligations and rights for the rulers and the ruled that the group has detailed in a number of

\textsuperscript{405} “We Feel We Are Cursed” - Life under ISIS in Sirte, Libya,” (Human Rights Watch, 2016).
\textsuperscript{409} D. Beetham, The Legitimation of Power (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), x.
publications. One of the most telling of these publications is the *wathīqat al-madīna*, or city document, for Mosul. Among the rights stipulated in this document is the right to security for people and property as well as the right to due process according to Islamic law. The level of security for the citizens of the “caliphate” was emphasized by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in his speech on November 2, 2016. The group’s propaganda videos also emphasize the group’s care for the local population’s safety, including interviews with civilians who praise the new rule. For example, in a video on *al-ḥisba* in Fallujah, the presenter says: “We care about the Muslim society, and that they receive their rights God willing. We care about the Muslims, about solving their problems, and reconciliation between them.”

A textbook produced by the group describes the role of the police as “servants of the governors […] They are the army on which the caliph, the *wāli* or the judge depends in order to stabilize security and protect the regime, arrest corrupt offenders, and implement the *hudūd* decided by the judge […]”. In addition to arresting and placing offenders in custody, they could impose fixed *hudūd* punishments on the spot and make decisions on *qiṣās*, retributive justice. Furthermore, they “decide *taʿzīr* and discipline those who do not abstain from crime, subdue the ignorant, prevent clashes, pursue evildoers and seek out immoral persons in their hiding places”. *Taʿzīr* are punishments for offenses not explicitly mentioned in *shariʿa*, as opposed to *hudūd* punishments, which are clearly outlined in Islamic law. The latter include the death penalty for “blasphemy” against God, the Prophet or the religion, adultery, homosexuality, “spying in the interest of the disbelievers”, apostasy, and murder. Calumny and drinking alcohol are punishable with lashes, theft with amputation of hand or foot. The punishment for “terrorizing the people” is banishment from the land.

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410 For an interesting overview on the IS “social contract”, see Revkin, “Does the Islamic State Have a “Social Contract”? Evidence from Iraq and Syria.”
IS hailed efficiency, professionalism and accountability as core values of its courts and police. The police branches with the most civilian contact were the general police, al-shurta al-islamiyya, and the morality police, al-ḥisba, which cooperated closely with each other. The general police was in charge of ordinary law enforcement and answered to the dīwān al-qāḍāʾ wa-l-mażālim, the IS ministry of justice. Al-ḥisba reported to the dīwān al-ḥisba, and was charged with “promoting virtue and preventing vice”, and maintaining a watchful eye on the Muslim community. This included everything related to appearance (enforcing hair and clothing rules for men and the complete khimār for women), observing prayer times, segregation of women and men, and preventing other “immoral” activities like singing, harassment of women or carrying a device with pictures that violate shariʿa. The dīwān al-ḥisba would regularly specify new prohibitions, like bans on decorated clothes, pigeon-keeping, using the expression “yā muḥammad” or Syrian colloquial expressions referring to Allah. The dīwān was also responsible for destroying places of worship deemed un-Islamic, price control in shops, and administrative tasks like issuing ID cards and travel permits. Al-ḥisba was featured in many propaganda videos, and in a media strategy document the group underlined the importance of broadcasting news showing the efficiency of IS media output, a snapshot of the Islamic State’s official media output, 417

417 The term ḥisba is not mentioned in the Qurʾān, but has been used by, among others, the Islamic scholar Abu Al-Hasan Al-Mawardi (974-1058), Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and Tāqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). It has been associated primarily with the personal duty of every Muslim to “promote good and forbid evil”, but also “the function of the person who is effectively entrusted in a town with the application of this rule in the supervision of moral behaviour and more particularly of the markets”: M. Talbi, “HISBA,” in Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill). The breadth of powers granted to the ḥisba by IS, with the right to intervene in private homes, is unusual.


419 The khimār includes a long, two layered black dress, face veil, gloves, and socks. Men were explicitly banned from wearing "clothes which resemble those worn by infidels or women", shaving their beard or hair or wearing chains or bracelets. See “lā iḥlat al-ʿuqūb al-taʾzīriyya”, Mosul 2014, specimen 13S in AJTA, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1.


424 Zelin, “Picture Or It Didn’t Happen - A Snapshot of the Islamic State’s Official Media Output,” 90. In Zelin’s overview of IS media output, al-ḥisba was the third most covered theme after military and governance.
of the hisba.\footnote{The Islamic State, “al-tawjīḥāt wal-ta’mīmāt al-‘āmma”, \url{https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/08/General-Guidance-and-Instructions-Arabic.pdf}} Other police departments were shurtat al-murūr, which regulated traffic,\footnote{The Islamic State, “Shurtat al-murūr fi wilāyat Ninawā”, video, Ninawa 2015, \url{https://jihadology.net/2015/08/30/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-the-traffic-police-in-wilayat-ninawa/}} and al-jihāz al-amnī, the security police, tasked with preventing vital threats to the group’s control.\footnote{See Speckhard and Yayla, “The ISIS Emni: The Origins and Inner Workings of ISIS’s Intelligence Apparatus.”} The all-female al-khansāʾ police, directed at women, was featured in many media reports from Raqqa.\footnote{For an interesting analysis of an unofficial document on “Women in the Islamic State”, see Charlie Winter, “Women of The Islamic State: Beyond the Rumor Mill”, \url{https://jihadology.net/2015/03/31/guest-post-women-of-the-islamic-state-beyond-the-rumor-mill/}} In Mosul, its counterpart was a special “women’s team” of al-hisba.\footnote{The Islamic State, announcement, Specimen O in AJTA, Mosul, July 2015, \url{http://www.aymennjawad.org/17757/the-archivist-26-unseen-islamic-state}} Although punishments for severe crimes were decided by a judge, the police forces had considerable room to maneuver within the system. Part of IS’s justification for its justice system was that its rulings are “not manmade, not Western, not imposed on us by the West so they can rule us like they want”.\footnote{The Islamic State, “rasāʾil min arḍ al-malāḥām #12”, video, 2013, \url{https://jihadology.net/2013/11/23/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-messages-from-the-land-of-epic-battles-12/}} IS contempt for “positive law” in practice allowed the police to mete out punishments at their own discretion, especially in taʿẓīr cases.

### Efficiency

The years preceding 2014 were characterized by a complex and shifting division of control and influence in Mosul and Ninawa as a whole. After the second American-led offensive against Fallujah in 2004, many Sunni militants, including members of al-Qa’ida in Iraq, had been forced out of Anbar and were dispersed in Baghdad, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Ninawa,\footnote{Truls Hallberg Tønnessen, "Al-Qaida in Iraq: The Rise, the Fall and the Comeback" (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2015), 367.} which ultimately caused the security situation in Mosul to deteriorate, especially from 2007 on. As the central government failed to uphold a monopoly on violence, civilians’ loyalties were shifting between the groups that vied for power, sometimes along sectarian lines. In a large survey conducted in 2010, 51 percent of the respondents in Mosul cited security as their biggest personal problem, compared to 20 percent across Iraq as a whole. As an example, 47 percent of Sunnis in Mosul had observed kidnappings for ransom in their area during the
previous six months.\textsuperscript{334} Earlier surveys in the same research project have steadily shown a relatively lower trust in public institutions among Sunnis, as well as a lack of consensus on what legal system to use because courts were perceived as corrupt and ineffective in many areas.\textsuperscript{335} U.S. forces withdrew from policing Iraqi cities in 2009. Because of the fall in oil prices and the Maliki government’s budget cuts the same year, Mosul had only half the number of required policemen.\textsuperscript{336} Their legitimacy among the city’s mainly Sunni inhabitants was also questionable, partly because many units were infiltrated by Shia militias. According to a Mosul survey published in 2018, 25 percent replied that they had experienced police harassment prior to 2014.\textsuperscript{337} The Iraqi police were one of the main targets of the large anti-government protests in 2013–2014 in Mosul and other major cities.\textsuperscript{338} In this environment, Maslawis’ initial openness to IS as a guarantor of order and security is not surprising. Indeed, in the 2015 Zogby survey 16 percent of Sunnis in Iraq reported that they had confidence in IS.\textsuperscript{339} IS frequently presented statistics in its propaganda to demonstrate the efficiency of its law enforcement,\textsuperscript{340} and claimed that “crimes in the people’s neighborhoods” had dropped immediately after the establishment of their courts, “spreading safety and security”.\textsuperscript{341} It is difficult to establish the precise crime rates of a city under siege. However, for the purpose of this article, how Mosul’s inhabitants perceived the crime level is an important indicator of IS’s legitimacy. These factors are interlinked; research shows that people are more likely to comply with the law and cooperate with police when they see the police as a legitimate authority.\textsuperscript{342}

\textsuperscript{334} Gary Langer, "Dramatic Advances Sweep Iraq, Boosting Support for Democracy," (2009), https://abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/story?id=7058272&page=1. This series of surveys, “Iraq: Where Things Stand”, was the result of a cooperation between several media networks, and conducted by Oxford Research International, D2 systems of Vienna, and KA Research.

\textsuperscript{335} Nagorski, “Iraq: Where Things Stand”.

\textsuperscript{336} Benraad, “Iraq’s Enduring al-Qaeda Challenge.”

\textsuperscript{337} Revkin, "The Limits of Punishment. Transitional Justice and Violent Extremism " 57.


\textsuperscript{340} For instance, the group claimed that 470 \textit{hisba} cases had been raised and solved during the first month of its rule in Al-Raqqa, Syria. The Islamic State, “khayr umma”, https://jihadology.net/2014/05/28/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-for-the-good-of-the-ummah/


\textsuperscript{342} Tom R. Tyler, "Enhancing Police Legitimacy," The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 593, no. 1 (2004): 89.
When asked about the occurrence of crimes like theft, burglary, and violence between civilians in the period overall, the replies from my interviewees are far from unequivocal. Some reported a general increase. Others, like this shopkeeper in Mosul, reported a dramatic decrease because of the threat of losing limbs or being executed:

The crime level decreased to the level of being almost non-existent. Theft was punished by losing your hand. People were scared; it was not easy to know what could make you lose your life. 443

It is reasonable to assume that Maslawis’ experience with IS police efficiency varies depending on socio-economic status, location, and other variables, which should be further explored in future studies. Among my interviewees, there was a consensus that the general crime level increased over time under IS. Theft was the most common crime experienced by my interviewees. While IS corporal punishment for crime had a certain deterrent effect, this seems to have been outweighed by civilians’ hardship as the occupation dragged on, pushing otherwise law-abiding citizens to steal. According to several IS documents, personnel were transferred from the police forces to the military. 444 If this happened on a large scale, it indicates that the group increasingly prioritized military over regular law enforcement.

Linked to the question of perceived crime level is whether or not civilians in Mosul reported crimes to the IS police. A police officer is, after all, dependent on tipoffs from the public in order to crack down on crime. When asked whether they reported crimes to the IS police, found alternative solutions or simply chose not to act on it, my interviewees were almost equally divided. The two quotations below exemplify the differences in attitudes:

Yes, people went to dāʿīsh to report crimes when they happened, that’s just how it is. For example, a dispute about money, a car crash, a divorce. When the closest person with authority is a tribal sheikh, you go to him to report things. During IS, the sheikhs had no authority anymore, so we reported it to the IS police. We had no choice if we wanted a solution, we could not just wait for liberation. 445

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Some people reported crimes to their police, I and people I know did not. What would be the benefit from that? For example, if someone had his motorcycle stolen, who would find it? They didn’t have the

443 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.
445 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.
intelligence or capacity to solve crimes. I don’t believe it would give any result. We did not trust them, and we did not want to communicate with them. So it was better to forget about it.446

None of the attitudes exemplified above speak of great confidence in IS as an upholder of order. Interestingly, many of the interviewees who chose not to report crimes did not give disagreement with the IS penal code as the reason; rather, they did not believe it would yield results. This is not to say that they supported this code – most of them claimed that they vehemently rejected it – but it attests to a certain openness to new authority in an environment of chronic unrest and insecurity. Efficiency and tangible results, even if it meant that the perpetrator would be killed, were important features of a police force according to my interviewees. This is a common phenomenon in civil war.447 IS tapped into similar sentiments by claiming in its propaganda that criminal cases which had lingered for years in the previous system were now solved in less than a month under IS.448 Some IS administrative documents indicate that crimes were dealt with in the IS justice system. For example, prison files from Mosul cite stealing cars or hospital equipment or “stealing money from people” as reasons for detention.449 The New York Times found nearly 400 files of petty crimes reported to al-shurta al-islamiyya office in Tel Kaif, north of Mosul, where people had reported disputes over as little as 3.50 USD.450 However, these and other isolated examples say little about the overall law enforcement compared to the conditions before the arrival of IS. My interviewees who reported crimes to IS in Mosul told of mixed results. The data indicate that crimes that had the potential to stir up general disorder or discontent with IS were taken seriously, while reports of other crimes often did not yield results. Crimes prioritized by IS police included smuggling of illegal goods and burglary or theft by undisciplined IS members (see the next section). One of the few among my interviewees who experienced something resembling a real investigation was a doctor who reported a burglary in his home by purported IS members:

Some people who said they were from dāʾish came to our home, they accused us of working for the

446 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 20.04.2018.
447 Promises of “harsh, but just” rule as an alternative to a security vacuum have been important to the Taliban in Afghanistan, among many other groups. See for instance Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, ”No Shortcut to Stability. Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan,” (Chatham House2010).
Iraqi army, handcuffed us and took all the money in my house, the phones and the laptop. After that, I went to their police to report it. They answered that they belong to dāʾīsh but they are thieves, that they had recently joined the police. They were very polite to us. After that, they brought some suspects to my home twice and asked me if they were the thieves. But I don’t think they found them in the end.⁴⁵¹

When asked about the occurrence of crime under IS, my interviewees emphasized that they saw IS as the biggest crime problem during the group’s rule, in the sense that IS members committed acts that the interviewees usually would call criminal – even when they followed their own rules and regulations. Even though IS conveniently defined their own bank robberies, murders, theft, violence and sexual enslavement as “legal”, this did not mean that civilians’ sense of justice changed overnight. When Maslawis saw the houses of escaped neighbors being confiscated by IS, or civilians being killed for owning a mobile phone, they did not praise the group for consistently following their own rules. The following quote from a Mosul shop owner sums up a common sentiment among my informants:

At the time of dāʾīsh, my area became safer than before, there was hardly any theft, robbery, fighting, killings by regular people. But why was this? Because they themselves were doing all the crimes. And those who used to be criminals joined IS when they came. Others were scared to do any crime because of the harsh punishments.⁴⁵²

IS claimed to break with the nepotism that is common in public appointments in Iraq, and to employ people in its administration based on competence and not family or friendship ties.⁴⁵³ According to civilians’ descriptions in my interviews, meritocratic appointments did not seem to be a priority for the group in its Mosul police force, in the sense that no special skills or background was required. Reportedly, the IS police officers that they encountered in the streets following June 2014 were a mélange of foreign fighters, locals with no police experience, underage boys and well-known criminals from Mosul who had recently joined IS.⁴⁵⁴ According to my data, the police forces acquired their motley character at the very

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⁴⁵¹ Interview with man in Mosul, conducted in Mosul 21.04.2018.
⁴⁵² Interview with man in Nour neighborhood, Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.
⁴⁵⁴ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has explicitly directed his followers in several speeches to “strive to release Muslim prisoners everywhere”, indicating that inmates were seen as a resource for the “caliphate”. The group introduced its 2014 rampage in Iraq with several spectacular prison breaks, and the group’s recruitment and indoctrination in prisons is well known. See The Islamic State, speech released 26 December 2015, https://ia801500.us.archive.org/33/items/trbso. The Islamic State, speech released 21 July 2012, https://jihadology.net/2012/07/23/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-audio-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-
beginning of IS rule, contradicting claims that this was a desperate move by IS made towards the end of its rule when resources dwindled. By emphasizing allegiance over other qualities, IS was left with largely inexperienced men to police the largest city in its territories, after emptying the existing police system of human resources by large-scale persecution of Iraqi police officers.\textsuperscript{455}

In theory, Iraqi police officers were promised safety in the “caliphate” after going through \textit{al-tawba} or “repentance”. IS states this in its city document for Mosul:

\begin{quote}
To the apostates of the army and police and the rest of the unbelieving apparatus, we say that the door of repentance is open to anyone who wants it, and we have designated specific places to receive those wishing to repent subject to conditions. … For those who insist on remaining apostate, there is no alternative but death.\textsuperscript{456}
\end{quote}

In Mosul, the repentance process was implemented in two rounds. Police and army officers – both are commonly referred to by Maslawis as \textit{muntasibīn} or “affiliates” – followed the same repentance procedure. In the first round they were asked to register their names, hand over weapons and claim allegiance to the Islamic State. In the second round more detailed personal information was added and a repentance fee was paid.\textsuperscript{457} The repentance system was not only a way for IS to suppress potential competing organized armed forces, it was also a source of financial income.\textsuperscript{458} The repentance fees reported in my material vary from 1 million to more than 2 million IQD (1,700 USD).\textsuperscript{459} In an IS document from Mosul, the organization listed a

\begin{itemize}
\item Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Repentance: Financial Income for the Islamic State," \textit{Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi blog}, 28 September 2015.
\item Different sources report different fees demanded by IS, see for instance "\textit{dāʿish taṭlub min muntasibī al-dākhiliyya wal-jaysh dafʿa 2000 dollar aw taslīm musaddas gluck}", Al-Ikhbariyya, 18 September 2014, \url{http://www.ikhnews.com/index.php?page=article&id=130158}, Mosul Eye, 6 December 2015.
\end{itemize}
number of conditions for repenting.\textsuperscript{460} The repenter was not allowed to move, he would be killed if he committed any crime and he had to specify a guarantor who was responsible and would be punished in case he disappeared.\textsuperscript{461}

In practice, the repentance option put forward by the IS was in reality far from a guarantee of safety. In Mosul, existing officers in the Iraqi police were either forced to flee the territories, go into hiding, or risk becoming victims of IS extermination campaigns. Some former police or military personnel among my interviewees reported having completed the first part of al-tawba out of fear of repercussions. Many report that police and military officers who went to complete the second tawba disappeared after being rounded up by IS. This is also corroborated by the fact that IS prison files mention “police with tawba” as a reason for detention.\textsuperscript{462} An increasing number of media reports told of mass executions of former Iraqi police and military officers as the liberation of Mosul entered its last months.\textsuperscript{463} A former army officer described how he, after completing the first tawba, stayed in hiding:

I kept [my army background] secret; most people did not know, only the ones closest to me. I started selling vegetables. Four other officers in the army lived in this area, they were my colleagues in the army, they were killed by IS. In the end, when the fighting got closer, I ran away to another area. […] They did not start killing police and army officers until after the last repentance. At that point, they rounded up all the men in one neighborhood in a school and checked if they were muntasibīn, it did not matter if you belonged to the police or army. A part of them were taken by IS, a part we don't know what happened to. This was at the time when the liberation operation started.\textsuperscript{464}

\textbf{Accountability}

The revelation that more than 50,000 “ghost soldiers” and police officers were on the state’s payroll in 2014 – while their salaries ended up in generals’ pockets – highlighted the extreme

\textsuperscript{460} The Islamic State, “shurūṭ al-tawba”, Ninawa, Specimen 33U in AJTA, \url{http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-2}

\textsuperscript{461} See The Islamic State, specimen 18H in AJTA, \url{http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1}


\textsuperscript{464} Interview with man in Mosul, 27.04.2018.
levels of corruption and lack of accountability in the country’s security institutions.\textsuperscript{465} Endemic corruption has permeated all levels of state functions in the post-Saddam era, and perhaps most prominently the military and the police.\textsuperscript{466} Today it is omnipresent to the point that bribery is seen as standard procedure when receiving state services, crossing borders or securing the release of a detained relative. Added to this is the sectarian strife that in many ways is mirrored in the justice and security apparatus, further eroding trust in these institutions. Different police agencies pursue various political and sectarian agendas.\textsuperscript{467} According to the World Bank’s Governance Indicators, Iraq in 2013 had a percentile rank of 4 in perceived “rule of law”, including the quality of police and courts.\textsuperscript{468} In “control of corruption”, the corresponding number for Iraq was 8. Transparency International’s corruption perceptions index ranks Iraq as the 12\textsuperscript{th} most corrupt country in the world, a rank that has been relatively stable during the last decade.\textsuperscript{469}

With this as a backdrop, it is reasonable to assume that Mosul’s inhabitants would be receptive to rulers who showed even a minimum of commitment to keeping anti-corruption promises. Iraqi corruption has been credited with enabling the rise of IS.\textsuperscript{470} In her analysis of IS’s stated social contract, Mara Revkin holds that the group’s claims to fight corruption resonate in a region plagued by corruption on this scale. Yet, more important than the group’s official claims is its implementation on the ground. The fight against corruption has been part of virtually every Iraqi politician’s election campaign since the American invasion – and indeed it was one of George W. Bush’s official justifications for the invasion.\textsuperscript{471} In the following, I will assess how civilians in this study perceived the level of corruption, civilian oversight, and equality under IS law. I here use the term “corruption” to describe misuse of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{465} Suadad Al-Salhy, “How Iraq’s ‘ghost soldiers’ helped ISIL,” \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 10 December 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{467} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{468} The percentile rank indicates the percentage of countries worldwide that rank below Iraq. For a more detailed description of the methodology in the Governance Indicators project, see http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home
\item \textsuperscript{469} Transparency International, Corruption perceptions index 2017, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017
\item \textsuperscript{470} The governor of Mosul until June 2014, Atheel Al-Nujaifi, repeated this claim in my interview with him on 1 November 2016 in Erbil. Transparency International has also made this claim, see Katherine Dixon, “Corruption Helped ISIS Take Mosul. Victory Cannot Last While It Persists,” \textit{Defense One} (2017), https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/03/corruption-helped-isis-take-mosul-victory-cannot-last-while-it-persists/136065/.
\item \textsuperscript{471} “George W. Bush and Tony Blair’s message to the Iraqi people”, television address, 10 April 2003.
\end{itemize}
public power for personal gain or the benefit of a group, in discordance with the laws and regulations that the group established at the beginning of its rule.

Iraq’s police corruption has on several occasions been used in IS propaganda. For instance, a 2015 *Dabiq* article writes about Kurdish Iraqi forces that “their greed and corruption” underscore their inability to effectively wage war against the *khilāfa* 

472 In its official documents, IS claims to have structures in place to prosecute corruption and misbehavior by IS members. 473 In a document outlining the structure of the security apparatus in the provinces, *al-idārat al-ann al-iqtisādi*, the economic security administration, is charged with investigating “financial corruption and embezzlement and arresting the accused in those cases or placing them under disposition without arrest”. 474 It is also responsible for “monitoring the financial situations of the soldiers of the *dawla*, verifying and gathering information about the reasons for the increase of the wealth of a soldier of the *dawla*”, as well as preventing looting, smuggling of antiquities, and forging of currency.

My interviews confirm reports that corruption of the overt and semi-public type decreased under IS. Paying your way to better services or to escape trial was not common under IS. Along with anecdotal examples of punishment and execution of corrupt IS members, and a formal commitment to anti-corruption, this points to a decrease in overall corruption under IS and more accountability for “state” officials. However, my evidence also suggests that corruption became more centralized under IS rule. As the group seized control over the city’s formal economy, it also controlled its informal economy, in ways that in some ways echo Saddam’s increasingly nepotistic style of corruption during the sanction years of 1990–2003. Smuggling networks controlled by the president’s son Uday benefitted the *umanāʾ Saddam*, Saddam’s faithful inner circle. 475 The regime ruthlessly and systematically cracked down on graft by anyone outside of this circle. 476 In a similar way, IS made clear attempts to crack down on “unauthorized” corruption and misuse of power. At the same time, there are strong indications that the group controlled smuggling of goods banned by their own rules. This

472 The Islamic State, June 2015, Dabiq no 10, p. 33
473 In Tel Abyad, Syria, the group issued an announcement in 2014 encouraging people to bring any complaints about IS to their court every Thursday. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, Twitter, https://twitter.com/ajaltamimi/status/442777401592774656
included cigarettes, alcohol, antiquities, and refugees. The example of cigarette trade in Mosul under IS serves to illustrate this tendency.

Cigarette trade in occupied Mosul

Officially, smoking was strictly forbidden under IS as a form of suicide or self-harm. A few months after the IS takeover of Mosul, the group started systematically persecuting smokers, punishing them with lashes, fines, and sometimes prison. The level of fines reported by my interviewees vary, but would sometimes reach 150,000 Iraqi dinars (125 USD), a large sum for civilians, many of whom depended on savings. For selling cigarettes, additional punishment could be longer imprisonment and confiscation of property in addition to the cigarettes.⁴⁷⁷ A man who sold smuggled cigarettes tells of persistent crackdowns:

I went to the prison three times because of smoking and selling cigarettes. I have children so I had to sell [cigarettes]. The first time, some people told them that I had cigarettes, and some dawāʾish came and they arrested me and gave me 40 lashes. The second time someone came to my house and asked for cigarettes, and five minutes after he left, dawāʾish came and searched the house and found the cigarettes, and they took them and they took me to the prison for four days and gave me more than 40 lashes. The third time when they came to my house I wasn’t home, me and my wife were out shopping but my sons were at home and they beat them both […], and they took a lot of my cigarettes.⁴⁷⁸

In an announcement issued by IS during the coalition military campaign against Mosul, it was underlined that smoking was not permitted even during such “trying times”.⁴⁷⁹ At a first glance, in a situation with constant military pressure on its borders, IS prioritization of resources to persecute smokers is puzzling. In media reports, public burning of piles of cigarettes was taken as a sign of the group’s ideological rigidity. However, the cigarette ban not only effectively made the presence of the new police force felt; it also provided a steady source of income for the group. Like most Middle Eastern countries, Iraq has a large population of smokers – 36 per cent of the adult male population smokes daily.⁴⁸⁰ This meant

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 15.05.18.
that a large majority of my interviewees had been arrested, fined and/or lashed for smoking at some point between 2014 and 2017. A smoker recounts:

They checked for cigarettes everywhere, even inside electrical devices and inside the holes of curtains, because they knew that people were hiding cigarettes there. […] Someone I know was selling cigarettes illegally. IS found out and took his savings, his car, his cigarettes and his motorcycle.\textsuperscript{481}

Despite the official zero-tolerance policy on smoking, an overwhelming majority of my interviewees named IS itself as the main source of cigarettes during this period in which the group controlled the flow of goods into the city. There are examples of cigarette smugglers working independently from IS at great personal risk,\textsuperscript{482} but most often IS members or middlemen with close IS connections were named as the sources for cigarettes. One man recounts:

I saw that IS had a raid and confiscated cigarettes from people. Then they sold them in another area. My brother was a smoker, he got cigarettes from someone connected to IS. It was easy to get, you just ordered it and received it in ten minutes. In the beginning, one pack cost 12,000 Iraqi dinars. At the end of the liberation operation the price has reached 75,000 dinars.\textsuperscript{483}

A new cigarette brand of Armenian origin, Akhtamar, became the only brand available in Mosul during the IS occupation, indicating that the cigarettes were brought in from Syria. The IS cigarette trade gave rise to a standing joke among some of Mosul’s inhabitants, recounted in the following way by a man from Mosul:

\textit{Dā’ish} made us proud, they made us hold our heads high and united the people of Mosul. They made us proud [\textit{bayyadu wujūhna}, translated literally as “they made our faces white”] because everyone had the same beard. They made us hold our heads high because we all looked up for airplanes. And they united us because they made all the people smoke the same brand of cigarettes.\textsuperscript{484}

By systematically fining smokers, confiscating cigarettes, and retaining an unofficial monopoly on selling them, IS multiplied the value of each cigarette. The prices varied, but increased dramatically after the city was practically cut off from outside communication.

\textsuperscript{481} Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.  
\textsuperscript{483} Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Khazer camp, 17.04.2018.  
\textsuperscript{484} Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Hassan Sham camp, 15.04.2018.
Reportedly, a pack of cigarettes could be sold for up to 100,000 dinars towards the end of IS rule, 200 times its original price. It is difficult to establish whether the cigarette smuggling and selling was known by IS leadership. A hisba ruling from Syria sentenced an IS member to prison, a fine, flogging and exclusion for selling cigarettes, showing that at least occasionally IS members were punished for this. In Mosul, the smuggling and distribution was so widely known that it is reasonable to assume that the leadership either orchestrated or tolerated it. In addition to cigarettes, several of my interviewees reported that people with IS connections smuggled alcohol and drugs into Mosul and civilians out of the city. IS is known to take advantage of porous borders for smuggling of oil, weapons and antiquities. Iraqi intelligence officials and analysts have claimed that IS has become deeply involved in growing and smuggling cannabis in Iraq and Syria, and European investigators have discovered a smuggling network from Italy to IS-controlled territory in Libya.

These and other examples indicate that IS is no exception to the global trend showing increased entanglement of terror groups in organized crime. Descriptions of IS as rule-based and financially self-sustained have often underplayed the group’s smuggling of goods banned by their own rules. Traditionally, ideologically and politically motivated groups have been considered an antithesis to organized crime. According to this view, a group is located at one point in a continuum: “At one side of the spectrum are criminals, motivated by the simple prospect of plunder. At the other end are ideologues, driven by strong motives and seeking to change political and social conditions”. In this logic, a group becomes less of a “dedicated” terror group when it engages in profit-driven crime. However, as Santiago Ballina has duly

486 Similar claims have been made in media reports, see for instance Samya Kullab, "Someone is smuggling desperate civilians out of Mosul. It might be ISIS.," Foreign Policy, 7 December 2016.
488 “ISIS Resorts to Selling Drugs in Iraq, Syria for Funding,” Asharq al-Awsat, 26 April 2017.
489 Colin P. Clarke, "ISIS is so desperate it's turning to the drug trade," The Rand Blog, 24 July 2017.
noted, many groups are “hybrid organizations: comfortably rooted in both ideology and profit, constantly shifting their strategies and tactics as they evolve”.493 IS is a deeply ideological movement which simultaneously reaps the fruits of cross-border and internal smuggling of illicit goods and refugees. By issuing death penalties for similar activities by others, the group retained a relatively firm control on these revenue streams during their hold on Mosul.

Civilian oversight

For a police force to be accountable, civilians need formal avenues for redressing police misconduct.494 If police officers are distracted from crime control by other concerns, like personal convictions or enrichment, the society as a whole suffers. In turn, this discourages people from reporting crime or cooperating with the police, setting off a negative spiral.

The IS police is far from our usual understanding of democratic police. Still, the inhabitants of the “caliphate” had the formal right to file complaints about the behavior of IS representatives, including the police, as shown in the previous section. However, for civilians to use this opportunity in practice, a minimum level of trust in the institution is required. Even if some civilians filed complaints on IS police, the level of skepticism in the group’s police functions overall indicates that most civilians were hesitant to file such complaints, out of fear or lack of trust that it would yield any results.

Moreover, my interviews revealed that civilians often did not have a clear sense of the lines of command within the IS police, and the separation between its various agencies. When asked who had arrested them after breaching a rule, the answer was most often simply “wāḥid dāʾish” or the plural “dawāʾish”, and often the interviewee was unable to distinguish between a ḥisba officer and an officer in al-shurta al-islamiyya. Interviewees also used the term “dāʾishī” to describe militants working for the IS and civilians who had pledged allegiance to the group. Clear institutional lines between police and military are often seen as a prerequisite for democratic policing. Robert E. Looney points out how “the distinction between the police, the political militias and criminal groups is often marginal in the minds of Iraqis”.495 The increasing militarization of parts of the Iraqi police after the U.S.-led invasion added to this blurriness.496 The blurred distinction between the military and the police in the

case of IS is unsurprising as their “state” found itself in a continuous state of war from its inception to its downfall. Nevertheless, the perceived unclear lines between its various IS police agencies did not contribute to an increased sense of accountability and clear lines of command.

Equality under the law

In its outward communication, IS emphasized equality under the law for civilians (in the sense of male Sunni Muslims) and members of the group. Justice is applied evenly and the Lord of mankind is feared”, the narrator assures the viewer in a 2016 propaganda video, and the dawāwīn or ministries were described as “places for protecting rights”. A number of reports tell of IS members being punished or executed in public, including for alleged corruption. Such stories were also common among my interviewees, like this man from Mosul:

I saw one member of dāʿish being killed by a gunshot to the head in a public execution because he was accused of stealing from diwān al-ʿaqārāt [IS real estate ministry]. Another time I saw some dāʿish members who were arrested because they were accused of trying to take over a house in the name of dāʿish, without the permission of a judge.

Despite examples like the one above, it was a common opinion among my interviewees that high-ranking IS members were often immune to prosecution, even though it did happen that lower-ranking members were publicly executed. A vast majority of my interviewees claimed, based on their own experiences and observations in public, that IS members were treated more leniently in the justice system than civilians. A man from Mosul shared his view:

It all depended on the rank of the dāʿishī. If it was a regular dāʿish soldier in the street, yes, we saw that they were punished. But we never saw a dāʿishī on a higher level get punished. It was mostly a show to present an image to us “ʿawwāma” [“regular folks”] that it was an organization without corruption.

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497 March and Revkin, "Caliphate of Law."
498 The Islamic State, “The Structure of the Khilafa”, video, July 2016, [https://videopress.com/v/tv16QF5r](https://videopress.com/v/tv16QF5r)
500 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.
501 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018
Importantly, civilians could only observe public punishments and executions. There are some reports of higher-ranking members being punished.\textsuperscript{502} Yet, my interviewees generally reported a strong sense of inequality under the law, indicating that IS failed to project an image to the public of an efficient and accountable regime and police force. The widespread use of public punishments and executions under IS in itself highlights the group’s need to establish its authority as the only alternative. As Zachariah Mampilly notes, “symbolic processes that effectively reference the coercive power of the regime may reduce the need for the insurgent government to rely on force to ensure compliance”.\textsuperscript{503} What IS lacked in manpower, it made up for through these public performances of authority and law enforcement. Public punishment of undisciplined IS members was an important part of this performance, demonstrating both equality under IS law and efficiency by moving examples of its law enforcement onto the streets. Punishing disobedient foot soldiers who are tempted by immediate spoils is important for any group to retain internal discipline and focus on its long-term goal.\textsuperscript{504} Enforcement of internal discipline is therefore one of the dividing lines between a militia and a military.\textsuperscript{505} Nevertheless, my data show that many Maslawis were not convinced by these public shows of accountability, mainly because of their personal, negative experiences with law enforcement. My findings support Mara Revkin’s suggestion in her analysis of the IS social contract, namely that IS “selectively punishes its own members only when necessary to appease public demands for accountability”.\textsuperscript{506}

Furthermore, the discrimination between IS militants and civilians in access to food, housing, and electricity contributed to my interviewees’ sense of injustice under IS, even though this discrimination was officially justified by IS. Many of the interviewees lamented this, for instance this man from Eastern Mosul:

\begin{quote}
With IS, it was justice only in a way that benefitted them and their own interests. At the same time, their emirs were living in big houses with 24/7 electricity, while normal people had nothing. It did not create
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{502} See for instance March and Revkin, “Caliphate of Law.”
\textsuperscript{503} Mampilly, “Performing the Nation-State: Rebel Governance and Symbolic Processes,” 76.
\textsuperscript{504} Ideologically committed combatants who care about the group’s long-term goals can also be tempted to steal, in what Arjona calls a free-riding problem for rebel groups. Arjona, Rebelocracy - Social Order in the Colombian Civil War, 51.
\textsuperscript{505} See for instance Antonio Giustozzi, “The Taliban’s ‘military courts’,” Small Wars & Insurgencies 25, no. 2 (2014).
\textsuperscript{506} Revkin, “Does the Islamic State Have a “Social Contract”? Evidence from Iraq and Syria,” 19.
a sense of justice. There was nothing Islamic about their police or their prisons.  

Predictability in law enforcement

As described above, when occupying Mosul, IS entered a space with a decade-long history of lacking predictability for civilians. Predictability is a rare luxury for civilians in civil war. For armed groups contending with other groups for influence and power, acting in a more predictable way means compromising on the flexibility needed in warfare. Even so, for rebels with ambitions for long-term governance, it is necessary to at least display a credible image of predictability. In this context I use predictability to describe a situation where people can “form expectations regarding most domains of their life, most of the time”. As Arjona notes, both rebels and civilians are better off with some form of social contract that regulates behavior: Rebels can more easily monitor compliance and punish disobedience, and civilians can more easily adapt their behavior to avoid harm. Furthermore, rebels have incentives to establish clear rules on their own behavior, because it increases civilians’ incentives to obey the social contract. A common presumption is that the use of violence by rebels automatically leads to lost legitimacy. In a context where unpredictable violence by “roving bandits” is the norm, however, increased regularity in rule enforcement can increase legitimacy even though it is brutal, because it gives civilians much-needed room to protect themselves and their families and go on with their lives.

In Mosul, IS gradually made their new penal code known to civilians through public announcements, starting with written declarations and billboards for their morality code. Despite the apparent clarity of the rules, a majority of my interviewees describe an inconsistency in the implementation. As Douglass North and Barry Weingast argue with regard to state institutions, it is not enough for a government to establish a set of rights; it

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507 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.
508 See for instance Kasfir, "Rebel Governance - Constructing a Field of Inquiry," 39.
509 Arjona, Rebelocracy - Social Order in the Colombian Civil War, 28.
510 Ibid., 48.
511 Fransisco Gutiérrez-Sanín describes how leftist militias in Colombia were able to wrestle the power from violent bands by presenting an equally violent, yet more predictable alternative to their rule. Gutiérrez-Sanín, "Organization and Governance: The Evolution of Urban Militias in Medellín, Colombia," 248.
512 Among the earliest rulings in Mosul is this declaration from June 2014: Specimen 10M in AJTA, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.
must make a “credible commitment” to those rights in order to create meaningful governance. The following quote sums up the most common view:

If you were arrested by the Iraqi police, you knew that at some point you would be taken in front of a court, you would get a lawyer. With IS no, you were dependent on the person who arrested you. For example, sometimes they would cut the hand off someone who stole, but sometimes not, it depended on where it happened.

Rule enforcement is almost always imperfect, and it is not reasonable to assume complete consistency, especially considering the short time frame and limited resources in IS attempts at policing Mosul’s population. Yet, rebels depend on civilians having a certain level of respect for the social contract they present. My findings indicate that IS did not manage to foster such respect, partly because civilians experienced inconsistency. This is in line with reports from IS-held areas in Syria, where Amnesty International has documented large-scale arbitrary detentions by the group.

All of my interviewees experienced IS regulation of people’s private behavior as an invasion of their personal lives that went beyond a government’s role. Notably, this attitude was the same for interviewees in Mosul city center as for those living in the more socially conservative peripheries. The mass of administrative documents from diwân al-hisba show that this part of policing was a major priority for the group. Issues that were controlled by al-hisba included house mortgages, children’s play, and ways of mourning after someone’s death. The group’s continued expansion of the space for what was being policed was in itself a source of greater unpredictability and fear:

No matter how corrupt the Iraqi police was, it cannot be compared to the dâ‘ish

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514 Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 27.04.2018.
police. The Iraqi police did not interfere in the personal lives of people, like smoking, shaving, drinking wine, going to the cinema, being dressed in a certain way. It was something strange and foreign to us. It made us feel more unsafe.\textsuperscript{519}

Interviewees experienced the IS policing of such activities as unnecessary micromanagement, serving no other purpose than restricting their day-to-day life in an already challenging time. Although IS social policing is often described as extreme and exceptional, it is not uncommon that armed groups, including non-Islamist ones, regulate social interaction on a detailed level, including appearance and sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{520} For IS, such rules were not only ideologically important, they were an efficient way to increase social control in a situation where they were hugely outnumbered by civilians. Yet, the group’s persistent crackdowns on shaving and clothing did not serve to strengthen civilians’ respect for the social contract. On the contrary, in civilians’ experience, the social policing happened at the expense of IS prosecution of real criminals, which was seen as haphazard.

Many aspects of IS policing and court rulings became stricter towards the end of the group’s rule in 2016. For civilians in this study, this constituted a further breach of the social contract on IS’s part, because they saw the changes as opportunistic moves by the group. A doctor recounted his experience:

> I lived in Mosul the whole period under IS and I saw the rules changing, so it was not predictable. Like with smoking: In the beginning, they would kick people who smoked. Later, they would imprison them. At the end, they would kill them. It was the same with the internet. The taxes also kept changing. I opened my own clinic during the time of IS to earn some more money. They taxed clinics with 2.5 percent of the income each year. In the beginning, they told me that I was exempt from tax because the lower limit was 1.5 million dinar. The next time I went to them, they had decreased the lower limit for taxation to 600.000 dinar. So everything was changing all the time, it was not predictable. They changed the rules according to their needs.\textsuperscript{521}

### Conclusion

How did civilians in Mosul perceive the legitimacy of the Islamic State’s police branches? In

\textsuperscript{519} Interview with man from Mosul, conducted on the phone 03.01.2017.
\textsuperscript{520} For instance, guerrillas in Colombia at times banned homosexuality, adultery, earrings and long hair on men, and short skirts for women. Transgressors faced physical punishments. Arjona, Rebelocracy - Social Order in the Colombian Civil War, 185-86.
\textsuperscript{521} Interview with man from Mosul, conducted in Mosul 20.04.2018.
IS videos and magazines – directed at an audience outside of the “caliphate” – the group’s omnipresent police became an efficient visual proof of a state ruled by *shariʿa*. IS went to great lengths to portray its police as efficient, accountable, predictable and popular among the local population. The bureaucratic documents from the police sector paint a similar picture of a group dedicated to rules, regulation and documentation. Several media and research reports have suggested that many civilians living under IS preferred the group’s “brutal, but predictable” rule to the preceding state of anarchy and unpredictability.

This article has challenged this view, drawing on interviews with civilians living in Mosul in the period 2014–2016. The interviews reveal considerable cracks in the official image of IS police forces reproduced in some media and research reports. Legitimacy is a thorny concept. By dissecting civilians’ views on the efficiency, predictability and accountability of the IS police, the article has aimed to present a more nuanced view of the forces’ perceived legitimacy during this period. It has sought to highlight that civilians’ appreciation of certain parts of IS rule does not necessarily translate into legitimacy, even compared to the incumbent regime. Some Maslawis experienced the drop in crime among civilians as a positive development. However, the overall picture is one of less predictability for Maslawis in their everyday lives. First, civilians reported haphazard law enforcement in cases that were not of immediate importance to the group itself. The great variation in civilians’ experiences with crime control is a sign of inconsistent law enforcement. Second, IS’s claim of accountability became increasingly dubious for many civilians as they experienced corruption and preferential treatment of IS members. Third, the group’s image of being a predictable alternative to the previous order suffered because of extreme social policing, changing rules throughout the period, and large maneuvering room for individual police officers. In sum, claiming that the IS police forces managed to establish a meaningful sense of legitimacy among Mosul’s population is a hasty conclusion. This was the case in a city that prior to June 2014 was a lawless free-zone for armed group. At IS’s arrival, even the slightest improvement in people’s sense of predictability and order was likely to have boosted the group’s popularity among locals. The group’s disregard for this opportunity became one of the reasons why many Maslawis’ initial openness to IS vanished a few months into the group’s rule.
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Conclusion

“If Allah (the Exalted) causes the khilāfah to remain and gain strength, then it is thanks to Allah alone, for victory is only from Him. And if it vanishes and weakens, then know that it is because of ourselves and our deeds.”

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, June 2014

The aim of this dissertation has been to compare the image constructed of Islamic State’s governance of Mosul in its own material to accounts gathered from civilians living under the group’s rule, and explain the discrepancies between theory and practice. The articles have sought to present a fuller and more nuanced picture of how IS-run institutions worked on the ground in Mosul, focusing on the group’s relation with civilians in three central parts of its administration, namely education, healthcare and policing. Interviews have been an important source to complement the information available in IS propaganda and documents. The findings in this study have underlined the risk of taking IS’s own paperwork at face value, and showed the sometimes glaring contrast between the impression given by bureaucratic documents and civilians’ accounts.

Efficient governance of civilians, in accordance with its ideological doctrines, was central to IS’s project. Why did one of history’s wealthiest jihadi rebel groups, with an abundance of local resources and a professional military machinery supported by foreign fighters, fail to achieve this stated goal? This study provides some support for hypotheses that jihadi rebel groups are prone to sacrificing pragmatic state-building to keep their image of ideological purity. However, the findings have contributed to nuancing this explanation and shown that the reasons behind the failure of IS governance are more complex than an overzealous commitment to ideology. While IS’s religious doctrines can explain some of the characteristics of its governance in Mosul, this study has shown that many other factors came into play and affected the trajectory of its rule. IS’s governance of the health sector shows dogmatic micromanagement, but also purely predatory behavior to serve the organization’s immediate military interests and the individual interests of IS commanders. Its initial plan for

522 Audio message by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, June 2014, “hādhā waʿd allah” (“This is God’s Promise”), https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the.promise.of.god22.mp3
educating the population shows an uncompromising ideological line. Yet, the failure of that plan was due to a range of factors: The strength and legitimacy of existing local institutions, civilians’ agency, and military assault from the outside. Lastly, the failure of IS police forces to create a sense of legitimacy in the population was not primarily because of its hardline ideological commitment. Civilians’ main objection to IS police was that it was corrupt, unpredictable, and discriminatory.

IS’s inherent contradictions, which have been highlighted throughout this dissertation, contributed to tearing apart the group’s ambitious governance project even before the military campaign to expel the group from Mosul made it impossible to run government institutions effectively. Some of these contradictions are specific to IS, while others are typical to rebel governance situations in ongoing civil wars. The study underscores the importance of analyzing jihadi rebel groups in light of their local context, especially when a group involves itself so deeply with the local population. In this way, it has underlined the risk of seeing IS or any other rebel group as exceptional. Instead, considering both the local context and the wider literature on rebel governance will enrich our understanding of such groups. Furthermore, the case of IS shows that ideology in itself is not a constant. It can, and often does, change according to shifting circumstances.

Compared to its forerunners AQI, ISI and ISIS, the Islamic State, following its announcement in June 2014, made a stronger effort to cater to the local population in Mosul, at least during the first few months. However, many Maslawis’ initial support for IS quickly waned as they experienced that it was not able or willing to provide much-needed security, predictability and public services. For many Maslawis today, the ruins of parts of Mosul are reminders of IS’s failed attempt to govern 1.2 million people, and the military campaign brought on by its governance experiment. Most of the destroyed buildings – including hospital, universities, and police stations – are still not cleared or rebuilt two years after the end of IS rule. This points to some of the underlying reasons that allowed for IS to take over the city in the first place: widespread corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a divisive, dysfunctional Iraqi government. Iraqi politicians’ lacking willingness to change this means that Iraq is still a fertile ground for extreme groups like IS to grow and consolidate themselves again.

Conducting research in conflict zones is costly, complicated, time-consuming and risky. Even so, more studies based on interviews with civilians are needed to deepen our understanding of

rebel governance in general and IS in particular. Further research is needed to explore IS’s governance practices in Iraq and Syria, both micro-level studies and comparative studies. The variations between urban and rural areas under IS control and the interaction between IS and existing local authorities, like tribal sheikhs or religious leaders, are among the many important avenues for future research. Many accounts from IS-held areas have left the impression of civilians as either passive victims or IS-supporters. Such simplistic dichotomies are not only deeply unfair to the inhabitants of these areas, many of whom actively resisted and affected the way in which IS ruled. More severely, these simplistic accounts of civilians can be used to justify military action or extra-legal persecution of civilians, as has been the case in Mosul. More micro-level studies of the dynamics in rebel governance situations can help us see civilians as the individual agents they are.
Appendix

Timeline - The Islamic State’s occupation of Mosul

- IS control
- Contested
- Government control
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