

THE MAIN FACTORS EXPLAINING SALAFI-JIHADI GROUPS' MOBILIZATION AND RECRUITMENT AMONG THE KURDISH AND SUNNI-ARAB COMMUNITIES IN IRAQ: ISIS AS A CASE STUDY.

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This study intends to investigate how the Salafi-Jihadi groups succeeded in establishing an Islamic state in Iraq by focusing on the case of ISIS, specifically asking: What are the factors that enabled Salafi-Jihadi groups (specifically ISIS) to garner public support and mobilize among the Kurdish and Sunni-Arab communities in Iraq? The study follows a qualitative research strategy and is based on a case study design. Research data were, to a great extent, collected from primary sources via in-depth interviews with elites (representatives) from among the Sunni Arabs and Kurds and political elites in the Kurdistan region. The study reveals that framing, political opportunities and resource mobilization theories provide a framework for understanding the factors behind ISIS's rise and success. This research concludes that the combination of the following factors enabled the rise of ISIS and helped it to sustain its support among the Sunnis: (1) that the ceding of power to the Shiite authorities in Iraq and the Sunnis' exclusion from the power balance, and the resulting socio-economic grievances in Sunni areas, accompanied by the rise of authoritarianism and sectarian polices, created fear and anger within the Sunni community, and this, in turn, provided an opportunity structure for ISIS to gather sympathy among Sunni-Arabs and Kurds to some extent; (2) ISIS quite pragmatically framed these issues, mainly through the notion of 'a better life', to appeal to a large number of people, particularly the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds. ISIS used religion as a source of framing both to justify its actions and to evoke emotions. Also, the frame of 'injustice', conveyed within the 'Us vs. Them' narrative, presenting the Sunni Muslims as oppressed, and was disseminated through various media outlets. Finally, (3) ISIS's economic power, which mostly came from its oil sales on the 'black markets', enabled it to acquire resources and provide certain public services to keep the public support alive.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The popularity and support that Salafi-Jihadi groups, especially the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), garnered, not only among the populations of the countries where they emerged and were based but also in the larger international level, raises the question of what factors enabled its popularity and support. The 'ideology' that these groups promote, Salafism (particularly Salafi-Jihadism), is a conservative tradition within Sunni Islam based on the literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah (actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad) and rejects innovation (*bid'ah*) in religious matters. Accordingly, Salafism venerates the predecessors – specifically, the first three generations of Islam – and demands strict adherence to them (Mardini, 2013). Although there have always existed people embracing such an understanding of Islam, Salafism emerged as a social movement only in the 20th century, with the formation of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. Subsequently, the Soviet-Afghanistan war created

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a fertile ground for the growth of Salafi-Jihadi groups across the Middle East; then, veterans returning to the Kurdish region after the war formed their Islamic vision for Kurdistan (Romano, 2007). The modern wave of Jihadi-Salafism, on the other hand, was mostly born out of the conflict created by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and has subsequently grown within the settings of the Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria (since 2011) (Oosterveld et al., 2017). Today, Salafi-Jihadi groups are prominent in the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Baghdad and southern Iraq (Sunni Arab areas).

Al-Qaeda in Iraq was one of the first Salafi-Jihadi groups formed in this context, 2004. The group declared war against the US-led coalition forces and their local allies in Iraq (i.e. the Shiites, the Kurds and some sections of the Sunni Arabs) following the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006 – which, in 2013, took the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), later known as the Islamic State (IS) following the takeover of Mosul in 2014. The rise of ISIS in Iraq started with the marginalization of the Sunnis by the Shiite majority, which had largely been repressed under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Aggrieved by their political exclusion, Sunnis, mainly comprising Kurds and Arabs, gravitated in large numbers towards the Salafi movement (Levallois and Cousseran, 2017).

While Salafi-Jihadists can be defined as “violent rejectionists which aim at the absolute reconstruction of the world order at large and believe it is overall corrupt” (Maher, 2016, p.11) – which is also the ideology of ISIS – ISIS has differentiated itself with its extreme use of violence based on the doctrine of ‘Takfir’ (excommunication of other Muslims who are deemed not ‘true’ Muslims), and the ultimate aim of establishing a state (Levallois and Cousseran, 2017; Impara, 2018). Takfir is a main pillar of Salafi-Jihadism, and large-scale adoption of this doctrine opened a new chapter in the history of Islamist activism, as it had previously only been embraced by a minority (Badar, Nagata and Tueni, 2017).

Thus, against this background of the rise of ISIS, this study intends to explore the factors that created support for Salafi-Jihadism among a large number of Muslims, by asking the following research question:

What are the factors that enabled Salafi-Jihadi groups (specifically ISIS) to garner public support and mobilize among the Kurdish and Sunni-Arab communities in Iraq?

Many of the existing studies on ISIS are limited to socio-economic and/or grievance-based and psychological explanations, which do not take account of the full picture. The present study, however, aims at contributing to the literature on Salafi-Jihadi groups, in particular ISIS, from the perspective of social movement theory. The main theoretical framework of the present study, thus, is composed using social movement theory, by employing political opportunity, resource mobilization and framing theories conjunctively. This study treats Salafi-Jihadi groups as social movements within ‘Islamic activism’, which can be defined as “the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes” (Wiktorowicz, 2004a, p.2). The use of social movement theory in the context of the Middle East is contested, as it is typically grounded in

Western democratic countries with fairly open systems. However, this study follows Bayat's (2005) definition of social movements as fluid and flexible, able to fit a wide range of systems and ideologies, including Islamism. Social movement theory thus provides a framework within which to understand collective motivations behind the formation and practice of Islamic movements. Resource mobilization theory focuses on the strategic mobilization of resources, which may be tangible or intangible (money, expertise, natural resources) in achieving a desired objective (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988). Political opportunity theory is concerned with opportunities arising in the external environment that open up new possibilities (Tarrow, 2011). The term 'political opportunity' denotes "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 2011, p.163). These opportunities, along with the availability of resources, can either accelerate or decelerate collective action (Robinson, 2004). Following Munson (2001), who adapted political opportunity theory for his study of the Brotherhood, in this study it is employed to focus on the political opportunities that enabled ISIS to recruit, grow and succeed to account for the region-specific factors in Iraq not characteristic of Western countries.

Overall, political opportunity, resource mobilization and framing theories are employed together in order to analyze the underpinnings of the success of ISIS, with a particular focus on the determinants of the support they garnered among the Sunni-Arab and Kurdish communities. These theories guided the interviews, the primary data collection method of the present study, by directing the focus on specific factors and aspects of these movements.

This study is structured into five chapters. Following this introductory chapter is the Literature Review, presenting the existent literature on social movements in relation to ISIS. It is followed by the Methodology chapter, in which the research strategy and data-collection methods are outlined. The Discussion chapter discusses the theories in the case of ISIS among the Sunni-Arab and Kurdish communities in Iraq in the light of the interview data. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings and offers some suggestions for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to present (1) an overview of social movement theories, namely political opportunity structure, resources mobilization and framing relevant to the research question; and (2) the findings and arguments found in the existing literature about the recruitment strategies, underlying opportunities, and resources employed by Salafi-Jihadi movements, regardless of whether or not they are discussed in reference to the aforementioned theories.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS

As noted in the Introduction, Bayat (2005) suggests that social movement theo-

ry can be applied to Muslim contexts even though it originated in developed and politically open countries. Even so, it should be noted that there exists a fixed, or, rather, an Orientalist view – as discussed by Said (1978) – in the Western literature regarding the Middle East. For example, Lewis (1990) argues that it is inherent to Muslim identity to be opposed to the West, thereby dismissing important factors that may help to understand various aspects of Muslim societies and movements. Bassil (2019) argues that the contemporary Western representations of ISIS have also been informed by Orientalism, involving a ‘discourse of power’ that depicts the Middle East and Islam as the ‘Other’ of the West. Such Orientalist representations account for the emergence of ISIS as an inevitable result of the ‘savagery and fanaticism’ inherent in Islamic culture and identity. Pipes (2014), for example, dismisses economic, social and historical factors when viewing Islam as indistinguishable from ISIS. Wood (2015) holds a similarly ‘fixed’ perception by stating “they have taken emulation of Muhammad as strict duty, and have revived traditions that have been dormant for hundreds of years”. Bassil (2019), however, claims that, to better understand ISIS, Islamism and the emergence of ISIS should be contextualized and historicized, rather than reduced to inherent characteristics of Islam and rage among Muslims (Bassil, 2019, p.85). Such an approach is valuable as it considers both the historical and contemporary factors that may help understand the rise of ISIS, and thus is adopted in the present research. The present study thus examines ISIS as a social movement across the theories of political opportunity structure, framing and resource mobilization.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Excluded social groups face many obstacles when attempting to advance their interests in times of varying opportunities. While the classical approach considers how short-term ‘strain’ leads to an insurgency, which acts as an agent of change, others attribute ‘change’ to a wider and longer-term social process, which is less intense (McAdam, 2010). Tilly et al., for example, point to changes in political opportunity structures:

Urbanization and industrialization...are by no means irrelevant to collective violence ... their effects do not work as...[classical] theories say they should. Instead of a short-run generation of strain, followed by protest, we find a long-run transformation of the structures of power and of collective action (1975, p.254).

Similarly, Jenkins and Perrow argue that the opportunities which arise in the social environment independently from the movement itself often work in favor of social movements originating in “economic trends and political re-alignments” (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977, p.266).

Tilly (1977) discusses three important dimensions of opportunities affecting mobilization: (1) opportunities that lower or raise costs; (2) the power of a group to advance its interests; and (3) threats to a group’s interests to which the group

responds rapidly. He argues that the openness or closeness of a society determines how social movements act, i.e. whether they pursue conventional or unconventional means in raising their demands (Meyer, 2004; Tilly, 1977). Tilly (1977) sees ‘conflict’ and ‘group solidarity’ as vital to collective action, but also recognizes the role that the rationality of social movement actors, as well as those of beliefs, ideas and ideologies, plays in shaping interests and facilitating mobilization.

Tarrow (2011) also emphasizes changes in the political opportunity structure. Tarrow (1994) states that the challenge lies in getting together a dispersed population and transforming it into “common and sustained action” (p.9) and claims that “the major power of movement is exerted when opportunities are widening, elites are divided, and realignments are occurring...Even movements that are poorly organized can take advantage of generalized opportunities” (p.150). Thus, Tarrow (2011) adopts a strict political opportunity-based approach, while dismissing the influence both of grievances and resources in favor of political opportunities. However, unlike Tilly (1977) and McAdam (2010), Tarrow (2011) recognizes the role of cultural symbols or frames, which this study will consider along with the changes in the political opportunity structure and resources.

With regard to the Salafi-Jihadi groups, Oosterveld et al. (2017) argue that opportunities for the Salafi-Jihadi movements arose due to the alienation of the Sunnis in Iraq post 2003, the civil war in Syria, and the weakened Iraqi state, including the disbanding of the army. Weiss and Hassan (2016) state that the takeover of large parts of land in Syria was at the forefront of ISIS’s success, as this not only provided a base for mobilization but a pool of recruits ready to go to Iraq, where they were trained, a point on which Reuter (2015) agrees. Other scholars underline that the Arab Spring was the ‘breaking point’ for the Arabs, which the Salafi-Jihadi groups capitalized upon in a context of dismantled and weak state institutions, thus offering a pan-Sunni narrative for aggrieved Sunnis who did not get much in the distribution of the spoils by the US, and made it appealing for them to join such movements (Gerges, 2017; Robinson, 2004). Furthermore, Gerges (2017) identifies the government policies, particularly those of al-Maliki’s premiership, which failed to develop or alleviate any sectarian conflict, as underlying causes and opportunities for the rise of both ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

FRAMING

A prominent feature of Islamist movements is their use of ‘framing’ in order to generate support and recruit new followers. Framing is the interpretive schema used to find and make sense of events in an environment (Snow et al., 1986). Frames allow meaning to be assigned to events and ideas that are simplified and “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p.198). The literature of social movements suggests various methods of recruitment, such as recruitment in the form of pre-existing relations (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), bloc recruitment (Oberschall, 1973), or recruitment through con-

version (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980). Snow et al. (1980), based on an empirical study, note that interpersonal ties and networks are important in familial communitarian societies, such as Iraq in particular and the Middle East in general. These theories have, however, been criticized by Rochford et al. (1986) as static, arguing that social movements vary in terms of their recruitment methods.

Religion is an important frame not only because it is stable but, as Tarrow (1994, p.112) contends, comes with symbols and rituals that enforce unity and groupness, and thus is a cultivating ground for a social movement. Bayat (2005) states that Islamist movements employ frames of religious symbols such as martyrdom, halal and haram in order to influence their potential followers and gather resources (money, space, publicizing mediums and, most importantly, humans) from the public (Freeman, 1999). Ingram (2018) argues that this is exactly what ISIS took advantage of in Iraq and Syria at their early mobilization stages, with massive publicity in the form of magazines publicizing violence and a narrative attracting many people; and that the same strategy was popular among other groups for coverage and recruitment, such as Al-Qaeda's 'Inspire', the Afghan 'Jihad Quarterly', published during the Soviet invasion of Pakistan, and Nidul-Islam in Australia.

Robinson (2004) suggests that framing also acts as a simplifying ideology for the common recruit who may not be well versed in either Arabic or religious studies, and refers to the slogan 'Islam is the solution' serving this role. However, other scholars, like Jasper (2008), are against portraying framing as merely a simple recruiting strategy. They argue that the frames of 'being oppressed' and 'a corrupt world' speak to the search for glory and justice (Gamson, 1992a, 1992b), especially among the youth, and leads them to leave their idle and boring lives in the pursuit of something more meaningful and exciting (Robinson, 2017; Hemmingsen, 2015; Sageman, 2011). Likewise, Andersen and Sandberg (2018) note that Salafi-Jihadi groups portray their conflict as a defensive war that can only be resolved by fighting back, and, in the extreme case of ISIS, by creating a state. In sum, as noted by Wiktorowicz (2004a), the employment of rituals, signs, language and symbols reinforces identity in the rhetoric of Islamic-activism, and the most prominent frame used to convey the oppression of Muslims is 'the war waged on Islam by the West' (Wiktorowicz, 2004b).

Thus, framing theory can help explain the rhetoric as well as the recruitment strategies that ISIS has been using. Nonetheless, there is a potential pitfall to be avoided: the fact that rituals, symbols and lifestyles may not initially resonate with the target population/persons, requiring these ideas to be nurtured and improved (Snow et al., 1986). Fominaya (2010) argues that actors have common cognitive definitions about actions, ends and means which are not necessarily unified in their understanding of symbols and rituals, meaning that mere framing alone is not sufficient for successful recruitment and the overall success of a movement. This in turn demonstrates the importance of an eclectic approach to analyzing Islamist movements, using resource mobilization and political opportunity theories along with framing theory.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

A more critical approach asserts that a collectivity of people must feel aggrieved, and that there are specific ways to redress those grievances in order for social movements to emerge. According to resource mobilization theorists, however, grievances are not primary drivers of movements but are seen as relatively stable and even constant (Tilly, 1977; Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; Jenkins, 1983; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). As Haklai (2007) underlines, the central argument of this approach is that a movement needs strategic planning, effective use of resources and creation, and good management of new opportunities. From a similar perspective, Jenkins and Perrow (1977, p.251) argue that “collective action is rarely a viable option because of lack of resources and the threat of repression... [and so] when deprived groups do mobilize, it is due to the interjection of external resources”. Thus, the scholars in this school place primary importance upon other factors that accompany the rise of social movements, especially on resources which a movement possesses or garners. Differing from grievance-based models, therefore, resource mobilization theory postulates that the main task is to convert non-adherents into adherents and adherents into constituents, and to maintain constituent involvement (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Morris (1981) states that these resources can be internal – i.e. within the group – such as human expertise, or external – i.e. acquired – such as land or oil; and the combination of both creates a dynamic of power.

With regard to Islamist movements, bookstores, cafes and mosques are mentioned in the literature as the traditional sites of recruitment. Wiktorowicz (2004a) states that the mosque is the center for Islamic activism because it is where potential members are recruited, educated and mobilized. Some authors contend that it is the dissemination of belief systems in such sites that help movements to flourish (Polletta and Kretschmer, 2013), while others argue that it is rather their distance from the reach of authorities as they are religious sites which makes mosques a valuable resource for Salafi-Jihadi movements (Hirsch, 1990).

Winter (2015), however, argues that the advent of digital media enabled instant, direct contact with thousands across the world and became a major resource mobilization tool (Castells, 2015), which Tarrow terms ‘print and association’ (Tarrow, 1994, p.43). Page et al. (2011) state that Salafi-Jihadi (and/or terrorist) groups have used the media for three main functions: legitimizing the movement, spreading the message, and showing opponents that they are better than them. Reid and Chen (2007) have also found, based on an analysis of extremist groups, numbering above 50 both in Middle East and United States, that movements have also used the media to raise money and conduct training sessions. For example, Page et al. (2011) mention Al-Qaeda’s e-magazine *Sada al-Malahim*, arguing that it is portrayed as a truthful magazine, yet framing legal matters to suit its ends, such as the idea that feeding hungry Muslims is less important than funding jihadis. Likewise, it has been documented that ISIS has used various media venues, such as Al-Hayat, Dabiq and Afnad, and social media (particularly Twitter) to promote the advantages of

life under the Islamic state (Farwell, 2014; Ingram, 2015), as well as to publicize its development projects such as road-building and/or school building (Khatib, 2015; Malet, 2013). And Andersen and Sandberg (2018) add that the media used by ISIS includes music, videos, video games, magazines – both electronic and printed – and pictures (Andersen and Sandberg, 2018). The combination of these media types is important in making it accessible to all levels of the population, whether literate or illiterate, young or old, in close proximity or in another country. While Bayat (2005) questions the effectiveness of the media in the Middle Eastern context due to the prevalence of repression, censorship and lack of resources, various successful media campaigns of Salafi-Jihadist groups have proven the opportunities that various media provide.

Some other scholars underline the control of natural resources, such as oil, among the factors that allowed ISIS to gain considerable income, contributing to their arms trade and recruitment and the higher salaries given to members (Bloem et al., 2017; McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Furthermore, it is argued that the use of left-over weapons supplied to Iraq by the US was a huge leap forward in securing their strategic advantage, alongside the human expertise of the recruited foreign fighters, including bomb experts and other specialists (Khatib, 2015).

Therefore, resource mobilization theory, underlining the rational and strategic attainment of a movement's goals (Husu, 2013), can also help understand the rise of jihadi groups. The problem with resource mobilization theory, however, is that it ignores emotions and ideologies and limits itself to materialist factors (Aminzade and McAdam, 2002; Taylor and Whittier, 1995; Perrow, 1979). Perrow (1979) also criticizes resource mobilization, on grounds of its neglect of political interests, is indifferent to ideology and has an overly rationalistic image of social movement actors. Likewise, Wiktorowicz (2004a) asserts that it is exogenous factors that lead to a movement's ultimate success or failure, whether it has resources or not. These critiques lead us to political opportunity structure theory, as outlined earlier in this chapter.

This brief review of the literature has shown that, the literature on jihadi movements involves various accounts related to both resources that they garnered and changes in the political opportunity structure. While these are grounded in facts and valid, they are all partial, bringing to the forefront one aspect while ignoring others. Thus, a theoretical framework that employs political opportunity structure, resource mobilization and framing theories will help to perform a more comprehensive and deeper analysis of the factors that have enabled the Salafi-Jihadi groups (specifically ISIS) to garner public support among the Kurdish and Sunni-Arab communities in Iraq.

A MODEL OF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF ISLAMIST GROUPS

ISIS, the largest Salafi-Jihadi movement, is reported to have recruited 30,000 foreign fighters from 85 different countries (Benmelech and Klor, 2018). Therefore, under-

standing the recruitment process of Salafi-Jihadi groups is pivotal for explaining their growing success. The process of recruitment to Islamic groups, according to Wiktorowicz (2004c), occurs in four phases: (1) the individual becomes open to new ideas and beliefs; (2) the individual seeks meaning through religion after being exposed; (3) the narrative of the religious group appeals to the individual and s/he sympathizes; (4) social-interaction with the group's members takes place.

It is argued that although jihadist movements are considered extreme and irrational by most people, once an external event triggers a person's openness to these ideas, they start to consider them (Wiktorowicz, 2004c; Stark and Finke, 2000). Some explanations assign the extensive appeal of Salafi-Jihadi groups to lack of economic opportunity, alienation from society, and excitement over the potential fame and glory to be gained – the last one being particularly prominent among young, unemployed people – while not discounting the cultural and religious framing and manipulation these groups use (Andersen and Sandberg, 2018; Impara, 2018; Lewis, 2004). In a similar way, Roel (2009) claims that Salafism's appeal lies in the fact that it reverses the 'ills of life' – sadness, loneliness, unemployment and mistreatment of immigrants – and provides the disenfranchised access to a caring group. While such explanations may be valid in terms of referring to the conditions that rendered people open to new ideas and belief, they are problematic as it is not always the young and disadvantaged who join (Alkhadher and Scull, 2019; Ibrahim, 1980; Ansari, 1984). Thus, Wiktorowicz (2004a) argues that it is not possible to tell the difference between a joiner and an abstainer without taking into account other stages.

The second and third stages in Wiktorowicz's (2004a) model can be better understood through the notion of framing. Snow and Benford (1988; 1992) argue that framing is more effective when the narrative appeals to the individual; when it resonates with their beliefs; and it is backed up with legitimate evidence. The prominent method in the case of Islamist groups is referencing the Quran and the Hadith; i.e. these texts are manipulated to fit the context and narrative of violence (Boutz et al., 2019; Sandberg and Anderson, 2018), and also to arouse emotions. Jasper (1998) highlights the importance of emotions, which involve "assumptions and beliefs" open to change. Thus, emotions such as hope and fear, which are neglected by political opportunity theory, also have a role in the recruitment process through framing. Snow et al. (1998), for example, argue that the fear of losing 'the ideal life' causes a feeling of being threatened, leading to unrest, and acting out in order to avoid an 'unideal' life, society and values. These stages also involve identity creation through framing of the old times and the heroic characters these new fighters could transform into if they join and fight for 'the cause'. As Boutz et al. (2019) state, not only will the recruits attain such 'ranks', but they will have eternally recognized feats to their names – which would appeal to any average individual. Considering emotions and framing which are crucial to ISIS' strategies in Iraq cannot be neglected.

Social interaction with the group's members – the fourth stage in the model – involves interpersonal ties, which is considered to be a very powerful means of

promoting recruitment due to bringing together likeminded individuals. Diani and Moffatt (2016) claim that Sunni mobilization was strongly communitarian, based on tribal structures and tightly knit communities. This was also the case in other parts of the Middle East, indicating that interpersonal ties/connections play a vital role in exposing people to extremist groups and facilitating their recruitment by them. However, McAdam and Paulsen (1993) disagree to some extent, claiming that the main factors are not interpersonal ties or organizational embeddedness but rather personal identification with the group, because if one is not convinced of the 'truth' of the message, interpersonal ties will not lead to recruitment. Wiktorowicz's (2004c) model, therefore, provides a framework to examine the factors that enabled ISIS to acquire public support in Iraq; as understanding the underpinnings of the stages of the recruitment process requires looking through the social movement theories discussed in this section.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study relies on a qualitative research strategy to explore the factors that have contributed to the success/persistence of ISIS among the Kurdish and Sunni-Arab communities in Iraq. The research relies on primary sources; and the semi-structured elite interview is the main data-collection method. Other primary sources include the magazine published by ISIS such as Dabiq. Information on ISIS's framing methods and resources have been gathered from articles, books and news reports that directly engage with ISIS's publications. Furthermore, a library-based research of secondary sources on Salafi-Jihadi movements in general, and on ISIS in particular, was conducted.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

As noted, the main data-collection method was through elite interviewing. While tribal leaders and families of people who have joined ISIS could have been interviewed, a more complete view encompassing political, religious and economic issues could only be achieved by interviewing elites from these three spheres. Thus, a total of 12 interviews were conducted with military personnel, politicians, religious leaders, experts and policy advisors.

The final sample included 10 Kurds and 2 Arabs – one female and one male. Due to security and physical difficulties (distance and access), only two Arabs were able to participate in this study. The interviewees included Abdulmanaf Ramazan Ahmad, Security Officer; Ali Bapir, Leader of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (Komal Islamic Party); Salhaddin Bahaaddin, General Secretary of the Kurdistan Islamic Union Party; Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin, General Commander of the Zeravani Forces; Abdullah Kharbit, a Member of Parliament; Alya Falih Owed Rashid (Al Amara), a Member of Parliament; Omed Abdulrahman Hassan, Head of the Majority Block (Kurdistan Democratic Party) in the Kurdistan Parliament; Safeen Muhsin Dizayee, Foreign Minister; Aziz Hasan Barzani, a University Lectur-

er; Rewaz Faiq, Speaker of Parliament; Kamil Mohammad Baqer, a Security Officer – General Directorate of Asaysh (Kurdish Security Apparatus) in the Directorate of De-radicalization; and Peshtivan Sadiq, Minister of Endowment and Religious Affairs (Further details about the interviewees can be found in Appendix - Table 1). The interviews were carried out in person at the interviewees' preferred location – usually their ministry or compound.

The non-probability snowball sampling method was used to select participants, as access to the elites was restricted due to the nature of their positions. In snowball sampling, one must adopt a cautious approach, as references based on personal opinions may bias the research in the direction of the referee's beliefs and opinions (Burnett, 2009). In order to avoid such a bias, and not to compromise generalizability, the sample was chosen to represent a wide range of positions, views and affiliations in the political, scholarly and military sectors from both Arabs and Kurds which the researcher outlined for the interviewees to understand what positions the researcher is seeking to be referred to. Some of the elites preferred to refer to certain experts and advisors for further information.

Given the 'privileged position' elites hold in society, they have access to information that is not found elsewhere (Richards, 1996, p.199); thus, they are assumed to have a better understanding of the factors that led to the birth and rise of ISIS. However, one must beware not to take the information collected at face value, since the elites may not have correct information and/or in any given interview environment they might refrain from not giving an answer that would reveal a lack of knowledge (Richards, 1996).

The participants were first asked basic questions to ease them into the interview atmosphere. Moreover, in order not to exhaust them during the interview process, they were given breaks from long discussions by way of shorter answer questions. Aberbach and Rockman (2002) note that the purpose of interviews is to understand what is not known to the public and highlight the importance of open-ended questions in interviews: as elites possess a lot of information and want to express this, confining them to simple 'Yes or No' types of questions can limit the scope and validity of a study. The combination of both long and short questions via a flexible interview method, therefore, allowed elites to relax in between, and also reduced the interview time to accommodate for their busy schedules.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Measures have been undertaken to ensure that the participants: (1) have correctly understand the project; (2) have given their consent to participate; (3) have the right to remain anonymous; and (4) are under no obligation to start or continue the interview. Given the security nature of the topics discussed regarding ISIS, all of the interviewees had adequate security and protection against any possible harm, in addition to their secure compounds. Although all the interviewees agreed that their names could be used, the data collected were encrypted and stored in a pass-

word-protected computer.

Given the focus of the research, some interviewees may have been worried about the purpose of the data-collection (Rivera et al., 2002). However, the reputation of the University of Edinburgh (i.e. institutional credibility), as well as of the referees, who are well-known personalities, and the clear explanation of the purpose of the study given by the researcher, avoided such pitfalls.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

A social movement can be defined in various ways. Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou (2015), based on the accounts of various scholars (Snow, Kriesi and Soule 2004; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Tarrow 2011) concisely define social movements as informal interaction networks between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations based on a certain shared purpose and solidarity; frequent, albeit not exclusive, use of non-institutional forms of protest; consequential claim-making directed at authorities and other elites and power holders; and a focus on political and/or cultural conflict, with the aim of either fostering or preventing social change (2015, p.40).

Groups always have grievances to varying degrees; yet what determines whether these grievances generate social movements are the changes in the opportunity structures, availability of resources, and the successful use of framing at a particular time.

Social movement theory can be employed to analyze Islamic movements in the Middle East despite the complexities of the socio-political context in these countries, characterized mainly by strict political control and limited communicative action (Bayat, 2005). Middle Eastern societies are advancing both economically and technologically, making communication networks effective – as witnessed in the Arab uprising, particularly in Egypt – and rendering extreme/overt political control destabilizing/risky for regimes. This chapter, therefore, will discuss the findings obtained from elite interviews in the light of the theoretical framework of social movement theory, by specifically addressing the framing strategies, rising opportunities, and available resources that have enabled ISIS to garner support among the Kurdish and Sunni-Arab communities in Iraq.

FRAMING, COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND EMOTIONS

Collective identity is defined by Polletta and Jasper (2001, p.285) as “an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution”, and they argue that actors seek to be recognized on the basis of their identity. It can be argued that the Sunni population wanted to be recognized and to exert political influence on the basis of its identity due to being marginalized by the Shiite-led government, and resorted to social movements such as ISIS once structures of opportunity and resources became available. Chong (2014), however, argues that reputational gains and benefits, such as fame, glory, wealth and women, are what motivate a participant to join a social movement. These benefits are mag-

nified and presented, or framed, by groups in such a way as to attract recruits and to gather support from various segments of society, particularly the youth. Likewise, as one of the participants, Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin (2020) (General Commander of Zerevani Forces), expressed, ISIS identified social, political and economic grievances/problems as weak points for people and exploited them by “presenting itself as a safeguard force that could bring justice”. However, Teske (1997) suggests that both the self-interest of actors and group loyalty should be considered together, as they are not incompatible. In fact, both factors are manifest in the case of ISIS, as the group is based on ideological commitment and also offers material gains to strengthen the commitment and recruitment-efforts of its members.

Besides identity issues, ISIS addresses emotions as well. The presentation of Muslims’ struggles around the world is framed to provoke emotions of anger, sadness and contempt and so generate what Jasper (1998, p.409) refers to as “moral shocks”. Abdullah Kharbit (2020) (Member of Parliament) and Ali Bapir (2020) (Leader of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan-Komal Islam) also stated that anger and hatred drove ISIS at large. In fact, ISIS has often used the suffering of Palestinians to generate support (Andersen and Sandberg, 2018; Ingram, 2018).

Therefore, while grievances drive participation, they are not a strong enough factor to lead to participation. As Wiktorowicz (2004c) suggests, selective incentives are critical; and the way these incentives are presented and framed is what essentially attracts new recruits. With their extensive media networks focusing on the youth, as also mentioned by Safeen Muhsin Dizayee (2020) (Foreign Minister), ISIS portrays itself as a ‘force’ against oppression and injustice, thus redefining what is tolerable as unjust and immoral (Snow and Benford, 1992, p.137). In other words, it is not the grievances per se but their presentation that attracts new members to a social movement (Snow et al., 1986, p.466); and in the case of ISIS, this is performed through the framing and manipulation of the meanings of the Quranic verses and the Hadith, the two main sources of Islamic jurisprudence. More specifically, these texts are ‘read’ and presented through a narrow and literalist approach to justify the use of violence, and are also re-framed to duplicate the archaic rulings with a modern twist in order to suit the group’s ends (Boutz et al., 2019; March and McCants, 2015; Rashid, 2020). All the interviewees agreed that ISIS had political ends and used religious means to achieve them, noting that ISIS presented an image of ‘the righteous state’ and claimed to implement the ‘correct version’ of Islam, which was a convincing idea not only for the youth but for many others.

The use of the ‘injustice’ frame is critical as it identifies Muslims as victims and inculpates others (Gamson, 1992a, 1992b; Benford and Snow, 2000; McAdam and Aminzade, 2002). Such a ‘positioning’ also functions to reinforce group solidarity and strengthens ideology as it creates an ‘Us vs. Them’ narrative. Malet (2013) argues that ISIS justified its use of violence in its struggle to establish a state using this narrative of threat from an outside force, as depicted by ISIS in its Dabiq/Rumiyah magazines, using the ‘injustice’ frame and inciting the emotions of anger. In

this way ISIS has ensured its credibility/legitimacy – which is critical for the success of framing – by ‘using’ Islam and framing its purpose using notions of ‘justice’ and a ‘better life’, which potential recruits are likely to relate to (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986), as highlighted by participants Rewaz Faiq (2020) (Speaker of the Parliament) and Kamil Mohammed Baqer (2020) (General Directorate of Security Office/Asaysh) during the fieldwork.

The frame of a ‘better life’ was supplemented by psychological and material incentives to sustain support both within the group and among the wider public: for its members, ISIS provided much higher salaries than other jihadi groups and made women available to men for sexual exploitation; while for the public, ISIS provided roads, infrastructure improvements and healthcare for all (Andersen and Sandberg, 2018; Oosterveld et al., 2017). The provision of public goods not only strengthened the legitimacy of ISIS vis-a-vis other Salafi-Jihadi movements but also gave people hope for a better life (Oosterveld et al., 2017). This was also pointed out by the participants. Ali Bapir (2020) (Leader of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan-Komal Islam), for example, affirmed that prolonged unemployment, especially among the youth, and state failure and lack of services, had already convinced many that a change for the better life was needed, and that ISIS exploited this situation. He said:

Many people became jobless, especially the Sunni Arabs, who were left without a salary and money. They were unable to feed themselves... This made ISIS surrounded with crowds and they exploited the anger and the needs of the people and they were giving good salary to those people.

The interviewees were unanimous that ISIS’s propaganda and imagery specifically targeted the youth, due to their circumstances: leading difficult and boring lives, and not fitting in, the chance of gaining fame, glory, wealth, women and more would be attractive for them, as the literature also highlighted earlier.

The importance of emotions in the process of framing is critical, as ‘frames’ must successfully stimulate emotions for both successful recruitment and mobilization. Peshtivan Sadiq (2020) (Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs) notes how, as a result of being deprived socially and politically, the youth went on to “destroy everything”. Tarrow (1998) points to religion as a very powerful and reliable source of emotions; religion, he says, “provides ready-made symbols, rituals and solidarities that can be accessed and appropriated by movement leaders [and] is a recurring source of social movement framing” (p.112). Salafi-Jihadi movements also employ beliefs and rituals such as prayer, the Friday sermon, paradise/hell, and rewards in the afterlife to motivate their members (Wickham, 2004). Jasper (1998) argues that emotions involve “assumptions and beliefs” that are open to change; emotions, he states, are tied to moral values, especially from perceived infractions in the moral order, which is why framing injustice as ‘Us vs. Them’ is used not only to rally support via this injustice narrative but to also evoke emotions. Stimulating emotions has played a vital role in ISIS’s mobilization and group dynamics. For example, symbolic acts by ISIS, such as beheadings, are intended to propagate the

image of ‘strength’ as well to as incite fear among the people (Impara, 2018). This rhetoric of oppression is also intended to trigger emotional responses such as anger, pity and sadness. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s speech in the Great Mosque of Mosul in July 2014, for example, described his followers as soldiers of righteousness bringing justice upon the ‘infidel’ other, which is a means to stir up emotions of hate and morality to fight this ‘injustice’ (Chulov, 2014). The nature of emotions, therefore, is such that they are beyond the boundaries of self-interest, and are usually driven by deeply held beliefs and moral understanding instilled via framing – which could explain the persistent membership, and hence partly the success of ISIS.

In sum, a vision of the world is constructed through framing, suggesting that the grievances felt in everyday life are solvable and addressable (Turner, 1969), that existing injustices will be eradicated by the ‘just-force’ of ISIS, and that any method moving toward this purpose is justifiable. Such a reading sheds light on several reasons why Kurds and Arab-Sunnis joined ISIS; that is, having already expressed their grievances towards central government or society to no avail, they saw this as an opportunity to engage in a social movement for desired change. Therefore, ISIS’ preference of extreme violence is built on the idea that, conventional, methods are incapable of yielding solutions, and that beyond-the-norm methods are needed. In this context, the extreme measures or actions of ISIS were not perceived as extreme. On the contrary, it can even be argued that the images of beheadings, which spread rapidly through the media, have enforced in-group identity and aided in the recruitment-process (Impara, 2018; Wiktorowicz, 2004a). As Jasper and Volpi (2018) assert, these tactics of violence have contributed to the growing symmetry between parts of society and reinforced identity. Therefore, networks of recruitment that stir emotions and address cultural norms seem to be even stronger and more effective than ideology (Munson, 2009 cited in Jasper; Volpi, 2018).

OPPORTUNITIES

According to political opportunity theory, mobilization is only possible when there are favorable opportunities produced by conditions external to the movement (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; McAdam, 2010). Political opportunity involves the “consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment or of change in that environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 2011, p.163; Gamson and Meyer, 1996). Tilly and Goldstone state that

Any changes that shift the balance of political and economic resources between a state and challengers, that weaken a state’s ability to reward its followers or opponents or to pursue a coherent policy, or that shift domestic or outside support away from the regime, increases opportunities (2001, pp.182-183).

In terms of potential effects, Tarrow (2011) states that opportunities “lower the costs of collective action, reveal potential allies, show where elites and authorities are most

vulnerable, and trigger social networks and collective identities into action around common themes” (p.33). Tarrow (1994) also argues that even weak and disadvantaged groups can take advantage of opportunities when they arise. However, in Iraq, due to the highly repressive nature of the regime, opportunities favorable for Islamic social movements were often limited. In other words, the opportunity structures that supposedly affect social movements – access to the formal political process, to civil society and the legal environment and to informal ties and networks (Meijer, 2005), the level of state repression, and the ability to find (elite) allies (Wiktorowicz, 2004a) – do not fully apply to the case of Salafi-Jihadi groups, which is why they are based upon informal networks and cultural and religious sites reinforcing Islamic identity (Singerman, 2004).

The literature suggests that ISIS exploited two critical external opportunities: the Syrian civil war and the internal instability of Iraq (Holbrook, 2015), specifically the “poverty, illiteracy, and wartime exigencies ... to curry favor with the population” (Hassan and Weiss, 2016, p.434). Firstly, the turmoil in Syria proved easier to exploit given that the government had lost control over large swaths of land, thus providing ISIS with an opportunity (1) to settle and grow its numbers there (Weiss and Hassan, 2016); (2) to capture resources, such as oil wells and various valuable artifacts that could be sold; and (3) as Khatib (2015) says, to take advantage of the cleavage between the Shiite (the ruling minority – Alawites/Alevis) and the Sunnis. Also, the Syrian takeover was what made Iraq possible for ISIS, as it changed the perspective of those who believed that such movements were doomed to fail. In Iraq, changes in the political opportunity structure, which allowed ISIS to emerge, occurred following the US-led invasion and occupation of the country and the exclusionary policies of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006-2014) against the Sunnis, in particular Sunni Arabs. The resulting sectarian conflict in Iraq produced a crippled government, which not only failed to provide basic services for its citizens but also marginalized the Sunni community. Thus, the weakness of the state apparatus and marginalization of the Sunni population by the Shiite-led government/s marked the turning point for ISIS, as the movement could exploit this opportunity to gain followers with the promise of a better life.

These circumstances were identified by almost all of the interviewees. Ali Bapir (2020) (Leader of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan-Komal Islam) and Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin (2020) (General Commander of Zerevani Forces), for example, argued that the divided government in the post-Saddam era, and the growing authoritarianism of Nouri al-Maliki, fostered the growth of groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS. Abdulmanaf Ramazan Ahmad (2020) (Security Officer), however, described marginalization as “a consequence not a cause” of the power given to the Shiites over Sunnis after the 2003 invasion. Abdulmanaf (2020) is right in the sense that, although there were grievances and a lack of resources and mobilizing structures, the potential achievements of social movements are limited (and also emboldened) by external events (possibly socio-economic) (Wiktorowicz, 2004a). This was

particularly evident, as Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin (2020) (General Commander of the Zeravani Peshmerga) and Abdullah Kharbit (2020) (Member of Parliament) noted, for the Kurdistan region of Iraq, from which few recruits came, as there were not so many opportunities for ISIS to exploit as in Syria and Iraq.

Other changes in the opportunity structures that ISIS initially capitalized upon were the de-Baathification of the Iraqi army and the Arab Spring (Khatib, 2015). The de-Baathification of the state and particularly the army simply created thousands of unemployed and aggrieved soldiers who had nowhere to go. They saw ISIS as offering them an opportunity for a better life, as Rewaz Faiq (2020) (Speaker of the Parliament) said. The same point is raised by Oosterveld et al. (2017), who state that ‘abandoned’ members of the Iraqi army headed to Syria to take part in the Sunni vs. Alawite (Shiite) conflict. Similarly, Abdullah Kharbit (2020) (Member of Parliament) said: “those men were desperate and easily radicalized by ISIS leaders”. Thus, the conditions created by the disbanding of the Iraqi army, and the resulting grievances and sectarianism, brought ISIS many new members. Moreover, these new Sunni-Iraqi and Kurdish recruits already possessed expertise in the fields of intelligence and warfare (Levallois and Cousseran, 2017; Weiss and Hassan, 2016) due to having served under Saddam and some having fought in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion of 1979. Thus, unlike the Afghans in Al-Qaeda, they had knowledge of the land, cultures and people. The same points were mentioned by Security Officer Abdulmanaf Ramazan Ahmad (2020) and Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin (2020) (General Commander of Zerevani Forces) who underlined that these recruits were experts in their fields, such as intelligence, and that this had significantly contributed to ISIS’s success.

Safeen Muhsin Dizayee (2020) (Foreign Minister) mentioned the protests that took place in Fallujah in 2012, where people demanded their basic rights; he claimed that the way the Iraqi government responded to these events, i.e. by repression, led many to become extremists. Hence, this can be regarded as another possible external political condition contributing to the support and good recruitment that ISIS enjoyed. Similarly, the events that took place in the context of the Arab Spring created instability and a change in leadership (in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen) which led to a power vacuum in Syria. ISIS managed to make use of this opportunity and chaotic environment to take control of important resources and appeal to a specific segment of discontented people who had lost out in these conflicts.

Overall, as Tarrow (1994) notes, weak states provide more opportunities for collective action than strong states. The tearing down of the state institutions in Iraq post-invasion and the failure of the state-building process led to a power vacuum and eventually social turmoil characterized by sectarianism. The distribution of rewards and spoils along ethnic, tribal and religious lines further deepened this sectarianism and created a void into which a group like ISIS could step in to alleviate the suffering (Gerges, 2017). Syria, on the other hand, as Gerges (2017) argues, is as important because it provided the group with an environment that enabled free movement

and organizational strengthening through recruits and resources, which eventually allowed it to inflict a much more devastating attack in Iraq in 2014.

RESOURCES

According to resource mobilization theory, while grievances matter, they are constant and of secondary importance to the formation and success of movements; what matters are resources, organizations and opportunities (Tilly, 1977; Jenkins and Perrow, 1977). Resource mobilization theory concentrates on how and to what extent the acquisition of various resources (financial, human, natural etc.) affects the mobilization and prevalence of social movements. Resources differ in terms of importance; Freeman (1999), who distinguishes between tangible resources (e.g. space, money, ways to publicize a movement) and intangible (e.g. human) resources, deems the latter more important. ISIS has made extensive use of both, as without one, the other would not be possible to the same degree.

Contention with 'others' ('Us vs. Them') substantially increases when movements gain access to external resources such as oil, land and expertise that allow them to see how they might end the injustices and ills around them, and thus mobilize (Tarrow, 1994). Yet the success and persistence of a movement depend on the constant flow of resources (McAdam, 2010). As discussed in the previous section, the opportunities that presented themselves in Syria and Iraq allowed ISIS to seize substantial resources, thereby providing a continuous flow of financial and human capital. More specifically, ISIS financed its operations through the sale of oil, precious artefacts, and wheat and water, and also by executing kidnappings and imposing taxes on the population (Khatib, 2015).

These points were also raised by the interviewees. Rewaz Faiq (2020) (Speaker of the Parliament) said regarding the control of resources that it was "a reason for them to become stronger" and persist for a longer time. Similarly, Aziz Hasan Barzani (2020) (University Lecturer) stated that this was what "empowered" them. Thus, the difference between ISIS and the Iraqi government's capabilities demonstrates the importance of control over resources. In other words, while ISIS not only had a unified ideology but also the resources to promote/impose it, the government lacked them to a great extent (Levallois and Cousseran, 2017), which eventually led to the success of ISIS in 2014.

Resource mobilization theory is also important in terms of highlighting the importance of expertise and internal resources in a social movement's formation, tactics and strategies, which is evident in the case of ISIS, as the foreign bomb experts and former Baath intelligence personnel that were recruited by the group extensively strengthened its military capabilities. Apart from these resources, ISIS took advantage of the power of technology, especially social media, to disseminate its ideology all over the world. Safeen Muhsin Dizayee (2020) (Foreign Minister) pointed this out by saying, "they have networks of communication that portray the group as the only one standing against oppression and going beyond the boundaries of a country"

– which also highlights the framing strategies and relevant opportunities the group employed.

The importance of organization to a social movement is also discussed by resource mobilization scholars. McAdam (2010), for example, stresses that opportunities cannot be exploited without it. The case of ISIS illustrates how effective organization contributed to its success and continuity. In that regard, Aziz Hasan Barzani (2020) (University Lecturer) hinted at the government-like organizational structure of ISIS by identifying “the creation of the economic system by the Caliphate, which had a minister of economy and finance...”. McAdam (2010) enumerates resources that are critical to organization, and these include (1) membership, as members build the organization and help recruit other members; (2) solidarity incentives, which foster cohesion and recruitment; (3) communication networks, which serve the diffusion of ideas and aid mobilization; and (4) leaders, who direct the collective action. ISIS has demonstrated the importance of using these components effectively in terms of maintaining activity, adapting, recruiting and growing. Recruitment is performed by the existing members of ISIS through interpersonal and tribal ties – which various scholars see as critical (Diani and Moffatt, 2016; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Reynold and Hafez, 2019). Abdulmanaf Ramazan Ahmad (2020) (Security Officer) also noted that many tribal leaders provided resources to ISIS and welcomed them with gifts such as vehicles and money. Solidarity incentives mainly include group support, emotional support and ideology; yet material benefit can also be counted in this category (Wickham, 2004; Jasper, 2011). The material benefits, in the case of ISIS, include higher salaries, up to 1200\$ monthly and more (Khatib, 2015); women for single men; and a sense of pride and glory which reinforces motivation and satisfaction (Oosterveld et al., 2017; Khatib, 2015) – and all these were made possible due to the resources ISIS controlled. As McCarthy and Zald (1977) note, the more money is possessed, the more personnel can be hired; and ISIS was never short of money.

Communication networks spread via conventional media and other modern technological facilities, as the third element of organization, served a key role in ISIS’s management, operations and recruitment-processes, as discussed earlier. Given the power of the Internet and social media, mass communication has never been easier for social movements (Kernan, 2017). Not only did ISIS use media to gain followers, it also reduced the ideological and operational influence of its enemies. In fact, a former national security advisor suggested that it was Twitter and Facebook that made the Iraqi army leave Mosul (Weiss and Hassan, 2016).

Lastly, as noted, leadership and high-ranking personnel are of crucial importance to the organization of a group. The leading organizational resource for ISIS, as Reuter (2015) suggests, were the former members of Saddam Hussein’s intelligence service and army, who were partly responsible for the success of ISIS thanks to their expertise and knowledge. Thus, as noted by Sutton and Vertigans (2006, p.106), “the group relies on knowledgeable, educated and skilled recruits who provide com-

municative, technological, administrative and organizational qualities". In terms of leadership, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's creative thinking skills and his ability to rally his troops (Robinson, 2017) were especially evident when he declared himself a Caliph, as ISIS members immediately accepted him as a (religious) leader, suggesting the extent of legitimacy and power he enjoyed. Furthermore, strong leadership is a valuable resource for a social movement, as incentives received by members are facilitated by its leader(s). Accordingly, al-Baghdadi's image as a courageous leader who showed up at the Great Mosque in Mosul (Khatib, 2015; Andersen and Sandberg, 2018; Wiktorowicz, 2004c) proved to be significant in terms of gaining recognition, and thus recruits. Organizational factors, therefore, help get the group the resources and activism it needs, and are also a means to derive legitimacy and continued activism even when opportunities may be shrinking (Minkoff, 1997).

Another important resource was the mosque structure, as mosques were used for "teaching, socializing, organizing collective actions, building networks, recruiting" (Wiktorowicz, 2004a, p.10; Husu, 2013). Mosques facilitated the meeting of active and potential members, and thus the forming of networks. Groupthink and peer-pressure that emerge among gatherings of people with similar mind-sets and/or pre-existing relations based on repression or ideology help strengthen the resource base and recruitment capabilities of a movement, which, in turn, contribute to its success (Della Porta, 2013; Singerman, 2004). Interviewee Kamil Mohammed Baqer (2020) (Security officer) also pointed to this factor.

In terms of other revenue sources, oil wells in Syria were critical to ISIS's operations as it earned 1-2 million dollars per day (Weiss and Hassan, 2015). Moreover, oil smuggling to neighboring countries (Turkey, Iraq and Jordan) and religious alms earned ISIS millions (Weiss and Hassan, 2015); this in turn allowed the group to acquire and/or use other resources critical for its success, such as equipment, media campaigns, recruits, vehicles, public goods, social services for the population (Oosterveld et al., 2017) and weapons. Weiss and Hassan (2015) point to the importance of ISIS's tribal affiliations in terms of acquiring these resources, as its connections to and familiarity with local networks allowed it to gain secure passages for oil and travel which may otherwise have been difficult; this was confirmed by interviewees Rewaz Faiq (2020) (Speaker of the Parliament) and Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin (2020) (General Commander of Zerevani Forces). This point is also raised by Levallois and Cousseran (2017), who state that ISIS fighters knew the local tribes, terrain, and familial and communitarian networks.

The importance of resource mobilization lies in its focus on the availability of resources, rationality of agents (calculating costs vs. rewards), and strategies to be implemented to realize goals (Jenkins, 1983; Husu, 2013). ISIS demonstrated strategic use of the resources it possessed – especially compared to the Iraqi government, which, even though it had received military equipment from the United States, did not have a strategy and lacked effective leadership, ensuring accountability, unlike ISIS (Khatib, 2015). ISIS has drawn on the issues of security, a good life, and means

of wealth, all of which invites a rational cost/benefit analysis on the part of ordinary people. In the case of Iraq, the cost of living under the rule of ISIS was too high, yet the benefits of joining/supporting it were also high; and this was a rational calculation made by the ordinary public, thus dispelling the myths of irrationality and madness. In other words, ISIS's actions were a means to an end, despite how immoral and illegitimate its actions may seem (Alimi et al., 2015). However, it should be pointed out that such calculations are often made in the context of emotional whims and desires, which leads us to question whether ISIS members are indeed rational given that there is emotional interference by higher ranking members of the group via religious ideology and framing.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to analyze the factors that enabled ISIS to receive public support among Sunni-Arab and Kurdish communities in Iraq through applying political opportunity, resource mobilization and framing theories jointly. The theories of framing, political opportunities and resource mobilization, when used in conjunction, capture the full range of factors contributing to the rise and success of ISIS. It is possible to conclude that the success of ISIS can be accounted for by three factors. Firstly, the political instability in the region, particularly in Syria and Iraq, provided fertile ground for a movement to form given the discontent toward the government. The grievances resulting from the exclusionary politics of the Shiite-led governments in Iraq (against the Sunni minority) and in Syria (against the Sunni majority), accompanied by unemployment and poverty, led to internal conflict and civil war in the case of Syria, and thus weak governments. These conditions presented an opportunity structure for ISIS to emerge and sustain its existence. Secondly, ISIS managed to frame these issues in ways that appealed to large groups of people. Specifically, it built legitimacy through religious means – by establishing a state that it claimed was a 'just/Islamic state' and by manipulating the Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet. Moreover, it framed religion to justify its actions as an 'Us vs. Them' narrative and depicted Sunni Muslims as oppressed. This narrative was disseminated through multiple media outlets, such as magazines, videos and the Internet, and successfully appealed to many people, particularly the youth. Finally, the resources it seized and controlled were essential for running military operations, providing public services, buying equipment and paying salaries to members – all of which, in turn, contributed to sustaining its appeal and support among the public.

With regard to future research, evidence based on interviews with former ISIS prisoners would provide insights into the inner organization of the group as well as the mind-sets of members. Such research could provide a detailed explanation of the rise of such extremist groups and so help prevent the rise of similar ones. Furthermore, more studies that can go beyond the Orientalist perspective and analyze the events and groups in the Middle East through the framework of social movement theory are needed.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1 – CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTERVIEWEES

	Participant	Occupation	Task/Position	Ethnicity	Gender
1	<u>Safeen Muhsin Dizavee</u>	Head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government	Minister	Kurdish	Male
2	<u>Abdulmanaf Ramazan Ahmad</u>	Security Officer	Data Analysis and Research	Kurdish	Male
3	<u>Ali Banir</u>	Party Leader	Leader of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan	Kurdish	Male
4	<u>Abduleziz Waisi Azzulddin</u>	General Commander of the <u>Zeravani</u> Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Region	General Commander	Kurdish	Male
5	<u>Abdullah Kharbit</u>	Member of Parliament	Member of Parliament	Arab	Male
6	<u>Alya Falih Owed Rashid (Al Amara)</u>	Consultant Architect (Dr)	Member of Parliament	Arab	Female
7	<u>Omed Abdulrahman Hassan</u>	Members of Parliament (two rounds)	Head of the KDP Block, Kurdistan Parliament	Kurdish	Male
8	<u>Aziz Hasan Barzani</u>	University Lecturer	University Lecturer	Kurdish	Male
9	<u>Rewaz Faiq</u>	Speaker of Parliament	Speaker of Parliament	Kurdish	Female
10	<u>Kamil Mohammed Baqer</u>	Security (<u>Asaysh</u>) Officer	General Directorate of <u>Asaysh</u> /(Security) Directorate of De-radicalization Political Department	Kurdish	Male

11	<u>Salhaddin Bahaaddin</u>	General Secretary of the Kurdistan Islamic Union	Secretary General	Kurdish	Male
12	<u>Peshtiwan Sadiq</u>	Minister	Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs	Kurdish	Male

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