ALL JIHAD IS LOCAL
VOLUME II
ISIS in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula

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Cover video still: Sky News.
Figure 1: Per Capita ISIS Recruitment by Province

Fighter Rate by Province
(Fighters per 100,000 Sunni Residents)

- 2.0
- 4.0
- 6.0
- 8.0
- 10.0
- No Data

TUNISIAN HOTSPOTS
KEBILI
MEDENINE
TATAOUINE

LIBYAN HOTSPOTS
BENGHAZI
DERNA

SAUDI HOTSPOTS
HAIL (NEJD)
GASSIM (NEJD)
RIYADH (NEJD)
MEDINA
MECCA
Syria’s civil war attracted tens of thousands of men and women from around the world. By 2014, their most popular destination was the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which attracted more foreign fighters than any Salafi-jihadist group in history. In the past year, various coalitions of Kurdish, Iraqi, Syrian, American and other international forces have retaken the vast majority of ISIS-controlled territory. As ISIS lost territory, it also lost its ability to attract foreign fighters. Nevertheless, the question remains: Why did so many leave their homes and travel hundreds or thousands of miles to join ISIS?

This study tries to answer that question in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula by examining data on over 1,800 ISIS fighters who came from these regions, two of the most significant recruiting grounds for ISIS, in 2013 and 2014. When these individuals enlisted with ISIS, they filled out enrollment forms that included personal questions such as age, employment history and educational background. We analyze those forms in conjunction with census data, records of protest and other sources on previous terrorist recruitment efforts.

Terrorist attacks inspired by ISIS and similar groups remain a pressing worry around the world. As a result, a clear understanding of why these recruits joined ISIS remains vital to countering the continued jihadist terrorist threat.

Ascertaining human motivation for participation in terrorism is complex: Decades of research has found no single rationale that can explain why individuals join terrorist groups. However, our analysis finds patterns of ISIS recruitment that start with the local communities that foreign fighters came from.

**Key Findings:**

- **North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula had distinct patterns of ISIS mobilization.** Fighters from North Africa were socioeconomically underprivileged and came from regions characterized by a lack of access to economic and political power. Meanwhile, ISIS fighters from the Arabian Peninsula were relatively better off and came from regions with closer links to political elites.

- **Grand theories on the causes of radicalization miss essential local differences.** While regional patterns exist, jihadist recruitment draws upon specific local dynamics that vary even within the two regions examined here. There are no shortcuts to countering the appeal of ISIS and related groups: Local contexts must be properly understood to formulate effective counterterrorism and counter-radicalization responses.

**In North Africa:**

- **The Arab Spring and its aftermath created opportunities for jihadists to organize and mobilize on a wider scale than previously possible.** Jihadists quickly organized in the aftermath of the Arab Spring of 2011, creating the
Instead of debating which theory best explains ISIS mobilization, analysts should focus on where different theories have the most explanatory value

foundations for ISIS’ mobilization of fighters en masse.

- Libya and Tunisia, where governments fell during the Arab Spring, produced more fighters per capita than Morocco and Algeria, where governments survived local protests. Eighteen of the top 20 provinces ISIS fighters came from in North Africa were in Libya or Tunisia.

- In Tunisia, ISIS built upon local Salafi-Jihadist recruiting networks like Ansar al-Sharia, which took advantage of the post-Ben Ali environment of political openness to openly promote jihad. Tunisian ISIS fighters often listed Ansar al-Sharia’s leaders as having recommended them to join ISIS.

  - Kamal Zarrouk, a top Ansar al-Sharia leader, openly toured Tunisia to promote fighting in Syria and is explicitly cited by at least two Tunisian ISIS fighters as having recommended them to ISIS.

  - Tariq al-Harzi, also known as Abu Omar, an ISIS figure with ties to Ansar al-Sharia, was listed as a recommender for 13 Tunisian fighters. His brother Ali al-Harzi, another Ansar al-Sharia figure also known as Abu Zubayr, was listed as a recommender for 27 Tunisian fighters.

  - Noureddine Chouchane, an Ansar al-Sharia figure who ran an ISIS camp in Libya, was listed by 51 Tunisian ISIS fighters (8.7 percent of the Tunisian contingent) as having recommended them.

- In Libya, jihadists were able to operate and recruit openly amid the patchwork of militias that emerged following Ghaddafi’s fall. More than half of Libyan ISIS fighters reported having prior experience in jihadist conflicts, almost entirely in Libya.

  - Key ISIS figures took advantage of a lack of state security or law enforcement to recruit openly. They included Turki al-Binali, who traveled to Libya to recruit fighters and would become ISIS’ top religious authority.

  - In the chaos, many Tunisians used Libya as a recruiting ground for ISIS, to gain training in combat and as a way station to reach Syria.

- Most provinces in North Africa with high rates of ISIS fighter recruitment were economically and politically marginalized. They had high rates of underemployment, lack of political representation and poor access to social services compared to their national contexts. The geographic origins of ISIS recruits from North Africa suggest the group took advantage of long-standing frustrations in marginalized communities to mobilize fighters.

  - Derna (Libya) and Kebili (Tunisia) were the two provinces in North Africa with the highest rates of ISIS fighters. Nearly three-quarters of fighters from these provinces reported little or no employment.

  - Provinces in North Africa where fighters reported the least reliable employment had the highest rates of ISIS recruitment.
Most provinces in North Africa with high rates of ISIS fighter recruitment were economically and politically marginalized

There is a negative correlation between the quality of employment and the number of ISIS recruits in the top 20 per capita fighter-producing provinces in North Africa.

- **More than eight in 10 of ISIS' foreign fighters from Libya came from the country’s eastern region.** Eastern Libya suffered from higher underemployment than Libya’s west, was excluded from patronage networks under Muammar Ghaddafí and suffered from poor service provision. Fighters from eastern Libya reported worse employment situations than fighters from western Libya. The issue of marginalization is particularly acute in Derna, which had a higher rate of ISIS foreign fighters and whose fighters reported lower economic and educational attainment levels than anywhere else in eastern Libya, including Benghazi.

- **In Tunisia, fighters came at the highest rates from the capital, Tunis, and its suburbs or the southern border areas.** Tunisia’s wealthy eastern coast produced fighters at a lower rate than other regions of Tunisia.

- **Around the capital, fighters came disproportionately from economically struggling neighborhoods.** The lower-class neighborhood of Ettadhamen, for example, produced fighters at a rate three times that of the rest of the Tunis region.

- **More than half of all fighters from Morocco came from its poorer, less integrated northern provinces, despite this region accounting for approximately one-quarter of the country’s population.**

- **Areas of North Africa with high rates of ISIS recruitment had histories of protest and militancy that predated ISIS.** ISIS was the latest jihadist group to recruit North Africans from the areas highlighted in this report.

- **In Libya, more than eight in 10 ISIS fighters were from the east, which had a long history of militancy before the rise of ISIS.** Eastern Libya was the center of resistance in Libya during the Arab Spring and the site of substantial recruitment for jihadist groups in Iraq during the early 2000s. It was also home to a jihadist insurgency during the 1990s and Islamist opposition to Ghaddafí during the 1970s and 1980s.

- **The regions of Tunisia with high rates of ISIS recruitment had been active protest hubs during the Arab Spring, and some were recruiting grounds for previous jihadist conflicts.** Ettadhamen, a suburb of the capital that produced fighters at an elevated rate, was one of the first hubs of the 2011 Arab Spring protests, had been a site of Islamist and Salafist organizing during the 1990s, and political support for jihadism was common in the suburb after 2011. The town of Ben Guerdane, near the Libyan border, was a hub for ISIS fighters in southeastern Tunisia and had long been a source of fighters for jihadist conflicts.

- **More than half of Morocco’s ISIS fighters came from northern Morocco, which has a long history of protest and connections to organized crime and terrorism.**
In the Arabian Peninsula:

• ISIS mobilized different types of recruits from the Arabian Peninsula than those who joined jihadist conflicts in the past. Although there have long been Salafi-Jihadists from the Arabian Peninsula, those who joined ISIS were generally new to jihadist conflicts.

• In Saudi Arabia, ISIS fighters were disproportionately from the Wahhabi heartland of the Nejd, whereas previous sources of jihadists from Saudi Arabia were the cities of Mecca, Medina and Jeddah. People in the region of Nejd are more interested in the social ordering of Islamic societies, which means it is possible that ISIS’ propaganda of building an Islamic State resonated more strongly than al-Qaeda’s notions of geopolitical conflict. Social networks and mobilizations during the 2011 Arab Spring may have also played a role in the disproportionate number of fighters from the Nejd.

• In Bahrain, Sunni populations were militarized to help end the predominantly Shi’a Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011. Bahrainis joined ISIS at a higher rate than for previous jihadi conflicts in part as a result of this militarization.

• In Yemen, there were far fewer foreign fighters in the ISIS sample as compared to the number of Yemenis recorded fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan. This is likely for two reasons: first, that the ongoing civil war in Yemen kept would-be ISIS fighters at home; second, that al-Qaeda is more established in Yemen than ISIS. This means that if Yemenis were traveling to fight in Syria, they were more likely to join the al-Qaeda affiliate, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, than ISIS.

• Regions in the Arabian Peninsula with disproportionate numbers of ISIS recruits had larger proportions of young people (ages 15-24) than normal for their respective countries. Youthfulness was the most substantial positive correlation that this study found among hot spots of recruitment in the Arabian Peninsula, which also compared economic well-being and historical rates of jihadist mobilization.

• Provinces in the Arabian Peninsula with high rates of ISIS fighters were traditionally close to their country’s ruling elites. Though individual fighters from these regions might have been worse off in comparison to the general population, as a whole they did not come from marginalized communities.

• In Saudi Arabia, Qassim, the province with one of the highest rates of ISIS foreign fighters in the world, is a crucial region of support for the Saudi royal family and historically has been the heart of the extremely conservative Islamic ideology known as Wahhabism.

• In Bahrain, Muharraq, another province with one of the highest rates of ISIS foreign fighters in the world, was a gathering point for the counterdemonstrations that helped the Bahrain government suppress the 2011 protests.

• Seventeen of the 27 fighters from Bahrain cited Turki al-Binali as having recommended them to ISIS. Binali was a prominent Bahraini religious figure from an elite family who became ISIS’ top religious authority.

• ISIS fighters from Kuwait reported specialized skills. Abu Jandal al-Kuwaiti, for example, was ISIS’ second-in-command for military affairs in Syria before being killed in an airstrike. Ali Omar Mohammad al-Osaimi was trained
by the British navy and worked as an engineer with the Kuwaiti state-owned oil company before overseeing ISIS’ oil production in Raqqa until his arrest in 2016.

• The proximity of regions in the Arabian Peninsula with high rates of ISIS foreign fighters to political elites may partially explain the reluctance of local governments to prosecute ISIS recruits during the first few years of its existence. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait did not crack down on ISIS recruitment in their own territories until 2015, when high-profile attacks threatened their domestic security.

• The root causes that led to ISIS’ rise remain unaddressed in the Arabian Peninsula, which raises the specter of a renewed foreign fighter mass mobilization in the future.

Recommendations:

• Instead of debating which theory best explains ISIS mobilization, analysts should focus on where different theories have the most explanatory value. The debate over which theory best explains why people join terrorist groups has produced little consensus over four decades and is of little use to practitioners. We advocate an approach that first determines where recruits are coming from before assessing what might motivate them.

• Economic growth and political inclusion should be security priorities for North Africa. While it will be important to address ISIS’ ideological message in North Africa, ISIS’ mobilization drew upon long-standing conditions of marginalization that are likely to generate new mobilizations in the absence of efforts to expand economic and political inclusion in the region.

• Addressing the ideological roots of Salafi-Jihadism should be a security priority in the Arabian Peninsula. ISIS’ propaganda resonated among a new cohort of jihadists who utilized elite-level connections to facilitate the recruitment of fighters on a large scale. That these fighters were new to jihad and left the region to fight meant that they were not deemed a threat by the security infrastructure in the Arabian Peninsula. New policy approaches to the region must encourage governments in the Arabian Peninsula to address the ideological roots sanctioning violent religious radicalism and view conflicts that mobilize domestic militants to fight abroad as a serious security threat.

ISIS did not overtake the al-Qaeda jihadist network in the Arabian Peninsula but developed a new one
The main data set this paper analyzes is ISIS’ own records of more than 1,800 foreign fighters who claimed residence in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. This paper analyzes these two regions for two reasons. First, more than half of the fighters in ISIS’ records came from North Africa or the Arabian Peninsula—making them an important focus of analysis. Second, these regions have received little in-depth analysis compared to Western Europe, where information on ISIS fighters is more widely available due to public court records and substantial press reporting.

The records used in this report contain demographic details about age, profession, and education, but they do not directly ask about the recruits’ reasons for joining ISIS. The aim of this report is not to infer individual motivations of fighters from this data. As terrorism scholar John Horgan noted, four decades of psychological study has yet to provide a terrorist profile. Instead, this report aims to provide a detailed examination of the local contexts ISIS fighters came from in order to situate and deepen the discussion of possible motivations, how they vary, and how commonly discussed motivations like religious ideology and economic stress connect to specific local conditions. As New America Fellow Anand Gopal explained in a review of recent writing on ISIS, the key question is not just “What does ISIS believe?” but also ‘What conditions make those beliefs appear reasonable?’

This report is an exploratory data analysis. Its aim is to identify important trends based on ISIS’ personnel files. However, it does not conduct rigorous hypothesis testing. The report suggests findings that are worthy of further study and that challenge existing approaches to analyzing ISIS’ mobilization, but proving the theories presented here would require substantial further research.

The data used in this report are drawn from files containing the entry records of 3,577 ISIS fighters from around the world—of whom 961 came from the North Africa/Maghreb countries of Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco, while 844 came from the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Yemen. For this report, fighters were further divided by where they reported residing at a subnational level—referred to most often in this paper as the provincial level. A per capita fighter recruitment rate was then determined by comparing the number of fighters who came from a specific province to the province’s population of Sunni Muslim nationals.

For a reference on foreign fighter origins, see Appendix III for North Africa and IV for the Arabian Peninsula.

This report focuses its analysis on provinces where ten or more fighters reported residing. The socioeconomic analysis of smaller numbers of fighters and the analysis of fighter rates in
provinces with smaller numbers of fighters but also small populations are susceptible to large fluctuations based on the identity of a single fighter.

These fighter entry records were collected by ISIS at points along the Syrian-Turkish border. The data used in this report are based on similar, though possibly not identical, content as that outlined in the West Point Combating Terrorism Center’s report, *The Caliphate’s Global Workforce.*

Working with leaked documents always poses concerns about authenticity. As described in an NBC report from April 2016, these files were smuggled out of Syria on a flash drive by a defected ISIS fighter who said he stole the information from the office of a senior ISIS commander. We believe these documents are authentic. Our research tracks with the overall demographic findings of similar studies by the Combating Terrorism Center, which corroborated its findings with U.S. military sources.

Analysis that relies primarily on ISIS registration forms has four major limitations:

1. The data are based on personal details conveyed by the fighters to a terrorist organization. They may have lied or forgotten details. However, we believe the incentives for fighters to mislead ISIS administrators were minimal and would not introduce any systematic bias.

2. The fighters’ arrivals were recorded mainly between mid-2013 and mid-2014 at the Syrian-Turkish border. As a result, the forms mostly do not capture foreign fighters who first joined other militias in Syria (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham) before joining ISIS. Nor do they capture fighters who traveled through countries other than Turkey, although numerous sources have found that Turkey was by far the dominant transit route for fighters joining ISIS. In addition, our findings are relevant to the specific time period of 2013 through 2014. For example, since ISIS-perpetrated attacks spread across the Arabian Peninsula in 2015, the region’s security services have been more vigilant at policing foreign fighter flows. Therefore, a study of post-2015 foreign fighter flows would likely have different results.

3. While Syria was the primary destination for jihadist foreign fighters, and ISIS the primary beneficiary of the fighter mobilization during this period, the records examined here do not include fighters who joined other militant groups in Syria (e.g., those linked with al-Qaeda). Nor do they include records of militants who joined terrorist organizations but did not travel to Syria (e.g., participants in ISIS branches in North Africa or the Arabian Peninsula). Therefore, the ability to use these records to evaluate broader trends in jihadist mobilization is limited. Because these records include only ISIS fighters, they may undercount the extent to which a region produced fighters if those fighters disproportionately joined groups in Syria other than ISIS.

4. The records include errors and inconsistencies in the transcription of responses by ISIS officials. While some of these issues simply required a more careful and informed reading, others were more complicated and required interpretation or good judgment. A simple example is that many recruits from Saudi Arabia described their origins as “Bilad al-Haramain” (land of the holy places—another name for Saudi Arabia) or the “Nejd” (a geographically central region within Saudi Arabia). A more complicated example is the inconsistency with which fighters named the people who served as their reference to join ISIS. Those who cited Turki al-Binali, for example, used at least six variations on his name, including “Sheikh al-Binali,” “Sufyan al-Sulami.” These inconsistencies required detailed review and hand coding of each individual form.
Quantitative Scoring

This report replicates the system of categorization of fighter responses to the questions asked that was used in New America’s 2016 report *All Jihad Is Local*. To produce a system that allows for quick comparisons between fighters’ demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, answers to five questions in the files are scored from 1 to 5, and then averaged to provide an average score for comparison. That scoring system is summarized below. The higher the score, the better off the fighters in question are in terms of that specific socio-economic measure. The average scores for the overall global sample as well as the regional samples for North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula are displayed in Table 1. Even at the aggregate level of regions, it can be seen that fighters from the Arabian Peninsula are better off socio-economically than fighters from North Africa.

1. Marital Status:
   1 = Single
   3 = Married
   5 = Married with children

2. Previous Employment:
   1 = Unemployed, farmer, day worker
   2 = Student, unskilled laborer
   3 = Blue-collar worker, trader
   4 = Owner, professional worker, military/government
   5 = Advanced skills work

Unlike other demographic questions asked in the ISIS files, previous employment does not lend itself as clearly to an ordinal ranking, given the differences in conditions and pay even within similar jobs and the difficulty of comparing the vast array of jobs that fighters reported. However, the ranking used here provides a useful means of comparing at a glance the employment situation of fighters in different areas. It is important to take these rankings in context.

This report also adopts the concept of underemployment, which we use to refer to those fighters who report employment statuses in fields that tend to lack sustained, formal or predictable work arrangements, and who are likely to experience unemployment at least part of the time even if they report having work—those falling under job scores 1 and 2. This is in contrast to the way the term is used in relation to those with advanced educational attainment who work low-paying jobs.

3. Educational Attainment:
   1 = No education/minimal education
   2 = Completed elementary school education, or equivalent
   3 = High school education, baccalaureate, religious study
   4 = Part university education or technical degree
   5 = University education or greater

4. Religious Knowledge:
   1 = Simple
   3 = Moderate
   5 = Advanced

We caution against making claims about fighters’ religious knowledge from their responses to this question for two reasons. First, the responses are highly subjective, involving contextual biases that cannot be accounted for. Second, while fighters may report low levels of religious knowledge, this does not necessarily mean they are not religious or motivated by religious belief. In our view, over-interpreting responses to this question risk confusing “duration of piety for depth of piety” and “orthodoxy for belief” as Graeme Wood argued in August 2017.

As a result, this report does not rely on the responses to this question except to gauge the socioeconomic profile of a group of fighters. While there may be exceptions, it is fairly safe to say that pursuing extensive education (religious or secular) is a rough estimate of socioeconomic well-being.
### Table 1: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores for Global and Regional Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores [Standard Dev.]</th>
<th>All ISIS Files (N= 3,577)</th>
<th>North Africa (N=961)</th>
<th>Arabian Peninsula (N=844)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>2.2 (1.7)</td>
<td>1.8 (1.5)</td>
<td>1.8 (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.1 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.9 (1.1)</td>
<td>3.5 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.7 (1.1)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.0)</td>
<td>1.9 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.3 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.0 (0.9)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Birth Year</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Countries Visited:

1 = Zero countries  
2 = 1 country  
3 = 2 countries  
4 = 3-4 countries  
5 = 5+ countries

Countries visited is a useful proxy for socioeconomic wellbeing. However, the question is rarely used on its own because responses were generally not consistent; it is unclear whether some fighters answered by listing every country they had ever visited or reported only the countries they had traveled through to reach Syria. Instead, this variable was considered in context with the other factors listed above.

Other Questions Considered

Two additional questions are included to further contextualize a foreign fighter’s background. The first is age, which is reported by the fighters as their birth date in the form. The second is the fighters’ “previous jihad experience.” This latter question is subjective, with “jihad” occasionally being defined as involvement in armed uprisings such as those in Libya during the 2011 Arab Spring. However, at the aggregate level, the responses have comparative analytical value and are therefore included. A copy of the form and its translation are included in the Appendix.

Additional Data Considered

The scoring system described above is supplemented by other sources, including regional economic data, records of protest activity and other captured fighter records, to contextualize the data from the ISIS records. The purpose of these additional sources is to provide more detail regarding the local contexts from which fighters came.

In particular, this study draws upon the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) to assess levels of protest. The analysis of Saudi Arabia uses data on historical mobilizations of Saudis to jihadist conflicts to compare recent and previous recruitment efforts. Three sources were considered for this historical mobilization: Thomas Hegghammer’s data on Saudi mobilizations in the 1980s and 1990s; the Sinjar Papers, which were captured in an October 2007 raid near Sinjar, Iraq and include data on foreign fighters who joined al-Qaeda’s affiliates in Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007; and leaked files on prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay published by Wikileaks.

Finally, this study will also draw from interviews and secondary source material to support certain arguments. However, the main source for analysis remains the files themselves.
From 2013 through 2014, ISIS mobilized thousands of fighters from North Africa to fight in Syria. The Arab Spring protests in 2011 created conditions in Tunisia and Libya that enabled and fueled ISIS’ recruitment efforts. While the Arab Spring vastly expanded the opportunities for ISIS recruitment in North Africa, ISIS also drew upon pre-existing socioeconomic and political conditions. ISIS recruits came most heavily from parts of North Africa where residents suffered political and economic marginalization in the form of high rates of underemployment, lack of representation among their country’s political and economic elites, and poor access to social services in contrast to wealthier parts of the region. In addition, in the areas where ISIS recruited most successfully, the ISIS fighter mobilization was preceded by other expressions of political protest and militancy. These three regional patterns of ISIS drawing upon the Arab Spring, socio-economic and political marginalization, and a history of militancy, are described in more detail below.

The Arab Spring and ISIS Recruitment in North Africa

The 2011 Arab Spring protests and their aftermath in North Africa fueled ISIS’ recruitment efforts, fundamentally defining the pattern of recruitment in the region. The highest rates of ISIS mobilization occurred in the parts of North Africa where jihadists could openly organize amidst growing Salafist and Islamist political expression as a result of the protests and the subsequent disruption to government security.

Libya and Tunisia were the two countries in North Africa with the highest per capita national rates of fighter production, accounting for 18 of the top 20 fighter-producing provinces there (see Table 3).

The protests that toppled the Tunisian and Libyan governments emerged from grassroots mobilization, not from the work of transnational terrorist groups. In 2011, al-Qaeda was caught flatfooted, remaining silent until after the Tunisian government had fallen. The documents captured during the May 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, demonstrate that the al-Qaeda leader viewed the revolutions as an opportunity, but one that his organization would have to reshape itself to take advantage of—not one that it had created.

Instead, the Arab Spring in Tunisia arose out of popular anger rooted in perceptions of poor socioeconomic conditions and lack of political representation. It began when Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor in the interior province of Sidi Bouzid, set himself afire on December 17, 2010, as an act of protest and desperation. Within a month, the mass wave of protests sparked by
Boauzizi’s ultimately fatal gesture drove 23-year dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali from power. Haim Malka, deputy director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, emphasizes the importance of local class dynamics in driving the uprising: “Class is a huge issue in Tunisia,” he explained. “It is a huge part of the Arab uprisings, and we have completely overlooked it and underplayed the importance.”

In the aftermath of Ben Ali’s fall, security services were constrained in their ability to operate and Salafi-Jihadists openly built networks that became a foundation for ISIS’ facilitation efforts in Tunisia. Explicitly Salafi-Jihadist groups such as Ansar al-Sharia openly proselytized across the country in the first years after the revolution.

The revolution that started in Tunisia quickly spread to neighboring Libya, where protests began in solidarity and as an expression of anger over Libya’s own conditions of marginalization, particularly in the country’s east. The protests turned into an armed rebellion, fueled in part by the response of Libya’s longtime dictator Muammar Ghaddafi. The uprising against Ghaddafi mobilized long-standing jihadist networks. Ghaddafi’s fall, following a 2011 NATO intervention in the ensuing conflict, resulted in political chaos that allowed jihadists to openly train and operate.

In contrast, ISIS failed to mobilize fighters from Morocco at rates similar to those it achieved in Tunisia and Libya. While Morocco produced large numbers of fighters in absolute terms, Morocco’s per capita rate was more than 7.7 times lower than the rate at which Tunisia produced fighters and 2.4 times lower than the rate at which Libya produced fighters.

Unlike Tunisia and Libya, Morocco managed to contain the Arab Spring protests and prevent the emergence of open Salafi-Jihadist political activity. Despite Morocco’s far larger population, Tunisia experienced more than three times as many protest and riot events in 2011 and 2012. Morocco embraced policies to defuse the sense of marginalization driving protests, supporting reform and inclusion of Islamists, in contrast to the pre-revolution governments of Tunisia and Libya. Morocco had also sought to develop its marginalized north by providing substantial resources to promote its economy.

In addition, Morocco has one of the best counterterrorism security services in North Africa and has relatively tight control of its borders. This enabled the country to manage the security challenge of ISIS mobilization and suppress open jihadist organizing of the type that occurred in Tunisia and Libya. ISIS similarly failed to mobilize fighters in Algeria, where only 26 fighters reported residing despite the country’s population of about 40 million. Algeria, like Morocco, weathered the 2011 Arab Spring protests. In 2011 and 2012, Tunisia had more than 2.6 times the number of protests and riots as Algeria did, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, despite its far smaller population of about 11 million.

In addition, Algeria’s protests did not take on the same call for the end of the existing regime that marked the events in Tunisia and Libya. This was in part because Algerians feared a repeat of the violence of the civil war of the 1990s. Algeria was further able to limit protests from escalating by cushioning the economic stress that motivated much of the protests by providing subsidies, financed by its oil wealth, to stressed populations.

While Ansar al-Sharia leaders like Kamal Zarrouk—whose role is discussed in detail in the section on Tunisia—were able to openly tour Tunisia, holding forth upon the legitimacy and need to join ISIS and other groups in Syria, and in Libya jihadist groups were able to operate openly, in Algeria expressions of jihadism were easily infiltrated by the country’s security services or quashed militarily. For example, when an ISIS group announced itself in Algeria with the murder of a French hostage, Algeria mobilized its military and quickly crushed the group.
Table 2: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores in North Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores (Standard Dev.)</th>
<th>All ISIS Files (N= 3,577)</th>
<th>North Africa (N=961)</th>
<th>Tunisia (N=589)</th>
<th>Libya (N=103)</th>
<th>Morocco (N=243)</th>
<th>Algeria (N=26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>2.2 (1.7)</td>
<td>1.8 (1.5)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.3)</td>
<td>1.4 (1.2)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.9)</td>
<td>2.0 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.4 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.1 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.8 (0.9)</td>
<td>2.9 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.1 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.9 (1.1)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.1)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.4 (0.9)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.7 (1.1)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.0)</td>
<td>1.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.0)</td>
<td>1.5 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.3 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.0 (0.9)</td>
<td>2.0 (0.9)</td>
<td>2.4 (1.0)</td>
<td>1.6 (0.7)</td>
<td>2.2 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Top 20 Provinces of Origin for ISIS Foreign Fighters in North Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province (Country)</th>
<th>ISIS Fighters From Province (min 10)</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percent of Population that is Sunni Muslim</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Sunni Residents</th>
<th>Average Prior Employment Score of Province’s Fighters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Derna (Libya)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>163,351</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kebili (Tunisia)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>156,961</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Tunis (Tunisia)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>1,056,247</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bizerte (Tunisia)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>568,219</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Sidi Bouzid (Tunisia)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>429,912</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Grand Tunis (Tunisia)³⁸</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>2,643,695</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Ariana (Tunisia)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>576,088</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Benghazi (Libya)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>670,791</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Tataouine (Tunisia)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>149,453</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Monastir (Tunisia)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>548,828</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Medenine (Tunisia)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>479,520</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Sousse (Tunisia)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>674,971</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Kasserine (Tunisia)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>439,243</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Kairouan (Tunisia)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>570,559</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Manouba (Tunisia)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>379,518</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Gabès (Tunisia)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>374,300</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Nabeul (Tunisia)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>787,920</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Gafsa (Tunisia)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>337,331</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Ben Arous (Tunisia)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>631,842</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceima (Morocco)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3,556,729</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Fès-Meknès (Morocco)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4,236,892</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ISIS took advantage of the chaos of the Arab Spring in North Africa to recruit heavily from communities characterized by economic insecurity and political marginalization.

The two highest per capita fighter-producing provinces in North Africa were Derna, in eastern Libya, and Kebili, in Tunisia’s poor southern hinterland. The Ghaddafi regime excluded Derna from economic and political opportunities, and Kebili was far from the northeastern coast where most of Tunisia’s high-paying jobs are located. In both provinces, underemployment among ISIS fighters was rampant at 76 percent and 70 percent respectively.

Similarly, fighters from Tunisia and Libya as a whole reported lower average marital and prior employment scores than fighters from Morocco and Algeria, which produced fighters at lower rates (see Table 2).

In Morocco, 56 percent of fighters came from the northern coastal province of Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceima and the neighboring northern province of Fès-Meknès, the only provinces outside of Libya and Tunisia among the top 20 per capita fighter-producing provinces with at least ten fighters in the records in North Africa. Yet together, these provinces account for less than a quarter of Morocco’s population. The International Crisis Group notes that Morocco’s north has suffered from economic neglect and patterns of economic marginalization broadly similar to that of eastern Libya and southern Tunisia. The disproportionate role of Morocco’s north as an origin for ISIS fighters has been confirmed by other analysts looking at Morocco’s counterterrorism efforts.

Even in areas that at first appear to be wealthy, fighters tend to come from poorer neighborhoods. For example, in Grand Tunis, the metropolitan area encompassing the capital, which is the center of Tunisia’s economy and politics, poor suburbs produced disproportionately high numbers of fighters. These suburbs were not only poorer but also lacked access to the political power that sits in the wealthier areas of Tunis.

Among the top 20 provinces in North Africa with at least 10 fighters reporting residence in them, there was a negative correlation between a province’s mean prior employment score and the province’s per capita rate of fighter production (see Figure 2). This correlation is only a rough comparative measure of economic conditions, but it does suggest that the highest-producing provinces tended to be those with the poorest employment conditions among fighters.

Histories of Militancy and Protest

The parts of North Africa where ISIS mobilized fighters at the highest rates also shared histories of militancy and protest before ISIS’ rise to global prominence.

More than eight out of 10 of Libya’s fighters came from the eastern region of Cyrenaica (see Figure 4). Before ISIS’ emergence, other armed groups had mobilized in Libya’s east, stretching back from the 2011 Arab Spring uprising against Ghaddafi through the early mobilization of fighters to go to Iraq in the
Figure 2: ISIS Recruitment Rate vs Average Fighter Job Score

![Graph showing the relationship between ISIS Fighters per 100,000 Sunni Residents and the Average Prior Job Score (1-5) of ISIS Fighters per Province. The graph includes a line of best fit.]

- **Y-axis:** ISIS Fighters per 100,000 Sunni Residents
- **X-axis:** Average Prior Job Score (1-5) of ISIS Fighters per Province

Legend:
- Red circles: Provinces in North Africa
- Black line: Line of Best Fit
2000s to the Islamist uprising in the east during the 1990s. There were also early expressions of political opposition in the 1970s and 1980s.

In Tunisia, the major hot spots of fighter recruitment—Grand Tunis and Tunisia’s southern border region—were both sites of substantial political protest from 2011 through 2014. Both regions also had histories of prior jihadist mobilization, as well as tension and protest against Tunisia’s governing elites.

Similarly, the northern provinces of Morocco, the only places outside of Libya and Tunisia among the top 20 per capita fighter-producing provinces, have a long history of protest and Salafi-Jihadist militancy.

In Algeria, ISIS failed to mobilize fighters en masse even though the country had historically been a major source of foreign fighters for jihadist conflicts. Only 26 fighters reported residing in Algeria, and the only province to produce more than 10 fighters was the capital, Algiers. In contrast, in the Sinjar records, a sample of about 590 foreign fighters collected in Iraq from 2006-07, Algeria was home for 41 fighters. However, while Algeria had a history of jihadism, it did not experience substantial Arab Spring demonstrations, escaping the outburst of protest against conditions of marginalization in the region. This limited ISIS’ ability to mobilize fighters.

The rest of this section on North Africa examines the subnational recruitment dynamics in Libya and Tunisia.

**Libya**

ISIS’ mobilization in Libya closely follows the patterns of mobilization apparent in North Africa as a whole. In Libya, the Arab Spring protests turned into an armed rebellion that toppled Muammar Ghaddafi’s government and allowed ISIS and other jihadists to operate openly and recruit fighters to join ISIS in Syria. In this conducive environment, ISIS drew largely upon young, unmarried, underemployed men in Libya’s east, where underemployment was extensive, the population was excluded from Ghaddafi’s patronage networks, and service provision was poor. The eastern provinces of Libya that produced fighters at the highest rates have a trans-generational history of militancy that long predated ISIS’ propaganda regarding building a caliphate.

**The Arab Spring and Libya’s ISIS Mobilization**

In 2011, the Arab Spring protests reached Libya and quickly escalated into an armed rebellion that toppled the Ghaddafi regime with the support of a NATO intervention. In the aftermath of Ghaddafi’s fall, his rule was replaced by political chaos that ISIS took advantage of to recruit. Specifically, the Arab Spring in Libya resulted in the growth of non-state violent actors while causing a contraction of the national economy, which in turn increased the impact of economic stress upon the Libyan population. In addition, the collapse of Libya’s security services and their replacement with a patchwork of militias allowed ISIS to recruit and operate relatively freely.

The political chaos of the Arab Spring rebellion in Libya gave rise to numerous militias. Some were jihadist, and the environment of non-state violence created conditions that jihadists could take advantage of—activating pre-existing networks. As Noman Benotman, a former commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, the main group behind the rebellion in Libya’s east during the 1990s, noted at the outset of the uprising against Ghaddafi, “If there is a power vacuum in Libya there will be an open market for al-Qaeda.” Indeed, transnational jihadist groups benefited from the open market for militancy: 56 percent of Libyan fighters joining ISIS in our data reported prior jihadist experience, five times the overall rate among ISIS fighters. The jihadist experience of Libyan fighters reflected the broader growth in militancy as a result of the Arab Spring uprising. As many as 300,000 Libyans joined militia groups of various ideological stripes.
Figure 3: Per Capita ISIS Recruitment in Libya by Province

Figure 4: Percentage of Libyan ISIS Recruitment by Region
At the same time, Libya’s economy suffered as the chaos disrupted economic activity, increasing the incentives for young men to take up arms. Libya’s GDP per capita fell by half in the wake of the uprising. As the economy contracted and instability expanded, many Libyans who had previously benefited from government employment lost access to government pay and faced a choice between day labor and unemployment. Belonging to a militia provided a solution—not just employment but social and economic advancement. The World Bank notes that “a large proportion of those involved in the conflict [over Ghaddafi’s rule] were unemployed,” continuing, “This fact indicates that formal and informal security organizations may well have provided temporarily employment opportunity for Libyans who previously may not have been successful in the labor market.”

Finally, the Arab Spring and 2011 NATO intervention resulted in the collapse of Libya’s security services, creating a security vacuum in which ISIS was able to operate freely, establish recruitment links between Syria and Libya, and take advantage of the growth in militia activity in Libya. One example is the Battar Brigade, which Libyan fighters in Syria formed in 2012. In 2013, the Battar Brigade joined ISIS, and by 2014, many of its members were returning to Libya. According to the International Crisis Group, which based its conclusion on interviews with residents of Derna, the Battar Brigade fighters “primarily went to Derna, at the time in the hands of a variety of Islamist groups, some of them jihadist.” Two Libyan fighters specifically mention the Battar Brigade as their recommender; both fighters reported residing in Derna.

In addition to integrating pre-existing groups of fighters from Libya and their networks into the Islamic State, ISIS also reached out from Syria to recruit and organize operations in Libya. For example, Turki al-Binali, a Bahraini national who would become a top ideologue in ISIS, traveled in 2013 to the Libyan coastal city of Sirte, where he encouraged Libyans to pledge allegiance to ISIS while preaching at the Rabat Mosque. Binali eventually left Libya. In February 2014, jihadist social media accounts heralded his arrival in Syria, which was soon followed by the revelation of his senior leadership role in ISIS, and then by his appearance in an ISIS propaganda video showing him teaching in Raqqa.

One Libyan fighter, an unemployed resident of Derna, listed his recommender as Sheikh Sufyan, a name referring to Binali. The fighter noted specifically that the recommendation was from Binali while he was present in Libya. While this is not evidence of the size of the effect of Binali’s presence in Libya, it does indicate he was there and had an influence in the recruitment of Libyan fighters.

ISIS’ success in taking advantage of the conditions in Libya following the Arab Spring is further illustrated by Hasan al-Salahayn Salih al-Sha’ari. A Libyan national who was trained by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the now deceased leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Sha’ari returned to Libya after being released from an Iraqi prison in 2012. From Libya, Sha’ari provided hundreds of thousands of dollars as well as personnel to Tariq al-Harzi, a senior ISIS figure also known as Abu Omar al-Tunisi, who organized recruitment from North Africa; Sha’ari funded others as well and eventually formed an ISIS branch in Libya. Harzi’s activities are described in more detail in the section on the Arab Spring in Tunisia.

ISIS’ ability to develop its networks was strongest in eastern Libya, where the Arab Spring uprising was launched and where state security institutions first broke down, giving rise to a patchwork of militias. More than eight out of 10 Libyan ISIS fighters came from the eastern region of Cyrenaica (see Figure 4). On the other hand, the southwestern region of Libya known as Fezzan did not become a major source of ISIS fighters. No ISIS fighters in the files examined here reported residing in the provinces of Fezzan. Although ISIS did declare a province in Fezzan when it announced its presence in Libya
in November 2014, far less ISIS propaganda was produced there than in other Libyan provinces.\textsuperscript{55} It is likely that the lack of ISIS recruitment in Fezzan was partly a result of the region remaining under Ghaddafi’s control until relatively late in the rebellion, limiting ISIS’ ability to benefit from the chaos.\textsuperscript{56} In addition, parts of Fezzan had benefited from the Ghaddafi regime, resulting in continued pro-Ghaddafi political and militia activity even after he was deposed.\textsuperscript{57}

ISIS’ development of the connections that enabled its mass recruitment of fighters from Libya would likely have been impossible—at least at the same level of coordination—had the Ghaddafi government not fallen.

**Marginalization and Libya’s ISIS Mobilization**

ISIS’ recruitment in Libya did not benefit simply from the post-Arab Spring chaos. ISIS drew recruits mainly from regions with conditions of underemployment, limited representation among political and economic elites, and poor service provision. Most ISIS fighters reported residing in Libya’s marginalized east and being unemployed or underemployed, young and unmarried.

Sixty-nine percent of Libyan fighters reported being underemployed; 32 percent reported being unemployed, working in agriculture or day labor, and 37 percent reported unskilled work or being students.\textsuperscript{58} Nineteen percent of the fighter contingent explicitly reported being unemployed—comparable to the 21 percent of Libya’s labor force who were unemployed in 2014, according to the United Nations.\textsuperscript{59}

Libyan fighters also reported the lowest mean prior employment score of the North African countries examined in this report, with a score of 2.1 (see Table 2). This was well below the mean score for fighters from North Africa and the overall ISIS sample, both of which were 2.5.

The poor job prospects of Libyan fighters reflect the overall deterioration of the Libyan economy following the 2011 uprising against Ghaddafi and continued conflict in its aftermath. In 2010, on the eve of the Arab Spring, Libya was by far the wealthiest of the North African states examined here with a per capita GDP more than 2.7 times that of Algeria, the state with the next highest per capita GDP.\textsuperscript{60} Yet by the end of 2011, Libya’s per capita GDP had fallen by half.\textsuperscript{61}

**Table 4: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores in Libya by Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores [Standard Dev.]</th>
<th>Libya (N=103)</th>
<th>Tripolitania (N=18)</th>
<th>Cyrenaica (N=85)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>1.4 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.1 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.0 (1.0)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.6 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.4 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Libyan fighters were also young and unmarried. The median Libyan fighter was born in 1992, making him only 21 or 22 when he entered Syria, and fewer than one in 10 reported being married. Libyan fighters were the least likely to be married compared to those from all the other North African countries examined in this report.

Libyan fighters overwhelmingly reported living in the eastern region of Cyrenaica, which Ghaddafi excluded from political power and much of the economic benefits of Libya’s oil wealth. More than eight in 10 Libyan ISIS fighters came from Cyrenaica, with the remaining coming from the western region of Tripolitania. Almost all of the Libyan fighters from the east come from Derna or Benghazi, despite these provinces accounting for less than 15 percent of the Libyan population.

Since Libya achieved independence in 1951, conflict among its three regions—Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan in the south—challenged efforts to craft a shared national identity. When Ghaddafi came to power in 1969 via a coup, he replaced a federal system that was dominated by patronage networks centered in Cyrenaica. In their place, Ghaddafi developed new patronage systems that tended to be based in the west of the country.

As the national economy was dominated by government-managed oil wealth, the shift in patronage networks placed Cyrenaica on the margins of Libya’s economy as well as its politics. Under Ghaddafi, Tripolitania, where the capital was located having been moved, received substantial funding, drawing internal migration from Cyrenaica. In contrast, Benghazi, the main city in Libya’s east, received far less investment.

Unemployment was also higher in the east than in the west. Despite renewed efforts at economic improvement in the years immediately preceding the 2011 uprising, Benghazi, the center of economic activity in the east, continued to face a poor economic situation and crumbling infrastructure.

The employment statuses reported by fighters from provinces in Cyrenaica, compared to those reported by fighters from Tripolitania, reflect this marginalization. While 72 percent of fighters from Cyrenaica reported being underemployed, only 56 percent of those from Tripolitania did. In addition, 17 percent of fighters from Tripolitania reported working as professionals with advanced skills, while none from Cyrenaica reported such work. The mean prior employment score for Cyrenaica is 2.0, compared to 2.6 for Tripolitania (see Table 4).

No fighters reported residing in Libya’s southern region of Fezzan, despite it being economically depressed and heavily reliant upon illicit smuggling, particularly in the wake of the post-uprising contraction of the national economy and public employment. However, rather than disproving the role of economic marginalization, the lack of ISIS recruitment in Fezzan illustrates how marginalization must be examined with an eye toward specific, local contexts.

Several factors may explain Fezzan’s lack of substantial ISIS mobilization despite its economic troubles. As noted, Fezzan remained under Ghaddafi’s control until relatively late in 2011, limiting jihadists’ ability to organize in the region. ISIS may also have been limited by the complex set of tribal and local loyalties that defined the region’s politics. As Libya analyst Frederic Wehrey...
noted in 2017 regarding fears of ISIS regrouping in Libya’s south, “Any movement to the south will encounter not only a crowded marketplace of armed groups tied to local communities and tribes but also al-Qaeda-affiliated networks.”\(^70\) The lack of ISIS mobilization thus does not mean that the region’s marginalization did not produce conditions conducive to recruitment, but instead may merely mean that ISIS was not sufficiently well situated to take advantage of those conditions. Also, ISIS’ ideology simply may not have appealed to residents of Fezzan, whereas eastern Libya had a long tradition of Islamist radicalism and militancy, as described in the next section. Leaders from the Tuareg and Tubu ethnic communities that make up much of Fezzan’s population who were interviewed as part of a Small Arms Survey report “overwhelmingly dismissed the possibility that radical IS[IS] ideology could take root in their communities, which they described as traditional, less religiously conservative, rooted in local culture, and loyal to strong tribal leaders.”\(^71\)

The specific local context of Fezzan complicates the understanding of the region as marginalized under Ghaddafi. Fezzan had long been on Libya’s economic and political margins, and was barely included in the discussions that gave rise to the first independent Libyan state.\(^72\) Ethnic minorities in the region suffered discrimination under Ghaddafi, but such discrimination was deeply rooted, including among supporters of opposition groups as well.\(^73\) However, unlike Cyrenaica, which lost substantial political and economic power relative to its past expectations as patronage networks shifted under the Ghaddafi regime, Fezzan, though still poor and home to populations excluded from Libyan politics and culture, did not see a collapse in status relative to expectations. In fact, Ghaddafi’s rearrangement of patronage networks benefited some communities within Fezzan—particularly parts of the Tuareg ethnic community that he embraced in those networks.\(^74\)

Finally, within Libya’s marginalized east, Derna was even more isolated and had a rate of fighter production about three times that of Benghazi. Ideological factors play a role in the disproportionate number of fighters from Derna—residents of the province have long supported terrorist groups. But the Dernawis (Derna residents) who joined ISIS were demonstrably worse off than even their neighbors in Benghazi, indicating that social issues of economic opportunity were also important.

Benghazi is the center of commerce and activity in eastern Libya. It is bigger than Derna, home to a major university and, before 1969, shared the status of national capital with Tripoli.\(^75\)\(^76\) Despite his policy of marginalizing the east, Ghaddafi at times targeted Benghazi for development.\(^77\)

On the other hand, most investment in eastern Libyan passed over Derna. A 2008 State Department cable released by Wikileaks, for example, read, “While Benghazi and other parts of eastern Libya had benefited in the last several years from increased government patronage, Derna continued to ‘suffer from neglect.’”\(^78\)

The responses of fighters from Derna and Benghazi regarding their employment statuses reflect this difference in levels of marginalization. Among the fighters from Benghazi, 68 percent reported being underemployed, compared to 76 percent of those from Derna (see Figure 5). Moreover, the plurality of fighters from Benghazi reported unskilled work or being students, while the plurality from Derna reported being unemployed or engaged in day labor.

While fighters from Benghazi have a mean prior employment score of 2.1, Dernawi fighters are worse off with a prior employment score of 1.8.

Dernawi fighters also reported much lower levels of education than those from Benghazi. Nearly half of the fighters from Derna had no more than a primary school education, while this was true for only 17 percent of fighters from Benghazi. In addition, no fighters from Derna had graduated from university, while 13 percent of those from Benghazi reported having at least a university degree (see Figure 6).
Figure 5: Occupation of Fighters in Benghazi and Derna

Table 5: Average Socioeconomic Scores in Cyrenaica by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores [Standard Dev.]</th>
<th>Libya (N=103)</th>
<th>Cyrenaica (N=85)</th>
<th>Benghazi (N=47)</th>
<th>Derna (N=34)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>1.4 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.1 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.0 (1.0)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.6 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.4 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In fact, fighters from Benghazi reported being better educated than the average fighter from North Africa, whereas those from Derna were much less so (see Table 5).

**History of Militancy and Protest**

ISIS’ Libya mobilization, focused in the east, was predated by decades of protest and militancy in the same region. In the 1970s and 1980s, eastern Libya was the center of Muslim Brotherhood opposition to Ghaddafi. During the 1990s, eastern Libya broke out in open Islamist rebellion. Jihadist militants based in the east fought the Libyan government, which used napalm against the rebels and set up roadblocks across Benghazi. Derna was placed under curfew. Tripolitania, however, remained calm.

In the 2000s, Libyan fighters joined jihadist groups in Iraq during the first stages of the Iraq war. These fighters, like those of the ISIS mobilization, came overwhelmingly from Cyrenaica. Among the Libyan fighters listed in the Sinjar records, 90 percent of those who listed their origins claimed residence in Cyrenaica. As with the fighters in the ISIS files, those in the Sinjar documents came predominantly from Derna and Benghazi.

In 2011, Cyrenaica was the center of the rebellion against Ghaddafi. Protests in Libya began in mid-February across the east, including in Derna, Benghazi and Bayda. The Transitional National Council, the first de facto post-Ghaddafi government, was established in Benghazi in February 2011. While Islamists were not the
only force behind the rebels, it was clear from the beginning that they were among the rebels. For decades, they have been an integral part of eastern Libya’s contentious politics.

The subnational regions of Libya with the highest rates of foreign fighters were places with limited opportunities and a history of militancy. These regions were heavily involved in the militant uprising against Ghaddafi, and the chaos following his ouster resulted in thousands of underemployed men with years of personal and political frustration, limited economic opportunity and recent combat training. In the absence of an effective security infrastructure, these young, mostly unmarried men were rounded up in a deliberate effort by ISIS to recruit them. And Libya was not the only country in North Africa with such a story.

The regions of Tunisia with the highest rates of foreign fighter recruitment shared conditions of economic and political marginalization—high underemployment, lack of representation among the economic and political elite, and often poor service provision—as well as histories of protest and militancy that predated the rise of ISIS.

To analyze Tunisia, this report divides the country into four contiguous multi-province regions based on their relative contributions to Tunisia’s economy (see Figure 7). The regions are described below:

**Grand Tunis:** Located at the northeastern tip of Tunisia, Grand Tunis is home to Tunisia’s capital, Tunis, as well as the surrounding provinces of Ariana, Ben Arous and Manouba. The greater urban and suburban area that makes up Grand Tunis is home to more than 2.5 million people. The sprawling metropolitan area lies at the center of Tunisia’s economy and politics, and 44 percent of the enterprises that account for the vast majority of Tunisia’s employment are located within it.

Grand Tunis was a hot spot of ISIS mobilization. It was home to 36 percent of the fighters who reported residing in Tunisia, and produced fighters at a rate of 8.1 fighters per 100,000 residents, the highest rate of the four regions examined here.

**The Southern Border Region:** Tunisia’s southern border region is home to more than 1.2 million people. It includes the provinces of Tataouine, which borders Libya and Algeria, and Medenine, which borders Libya and the coast, as well as Kebili and Tozeur on the border with Algeria, and Gabès. The region lies on the periphery of Tunisia’s economy and suffers from poor service provision, underemployment and reliance on an informal and often illicit economy.

This southern border region accounted for 13 percent of the ISIS fighters from Tunisia and produced fighters at a rate of 6.3 per 100,000 residents. Kebili, within the region, was the second highest fighter-producing province in North Africa after Derna, Libya.

In part due to the political openness that followed the Arab Spring, ISIS was able to mobilize Tunisians on a large and widespread scale. Fighters came from across the country and some even came from Tunisia’s professional class. However, the widespread nature of the mobilization can obscure the patterns that shaped it, leading to theories that emphasize ISIS’ ideology in the absence of the conditions that enabled it to have power.
Figure 7: Tunisian Regions by Foreign Fighter Rate
The Interior Periphery: Tunisia’s interior economic periphery is home to more than 3.1 million people. It includes the provinces of Jendouba, Béja, Kef, Siliana and Zaghouan in the northern part of the region and Kairouan, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid and Gafsa in its southern part. The region lacks access to the employment opportunities centered in Grand Tunis and along the eastern coast and has a far higher poverty rate than Grand Tunis and the economically central provinces of the eastern coast.

The interior periphery included 20 percent of Tunisia’s ISIS fighters and, as a whole, produced fighters at a rate of 3.8 fighters per 100,000 residents. However, recruitment was not uniform across the region. The northern provinces produced only 18 fighters at a rate of 1.3 fighters per 100,000 residents, while the provinces toward the south produced 5.6 fighters per 100,000 residents.

The Eastern Coast: Tunisia’s eastern coast extends south of Grand Tunis, including the provinces of Mahdia, Monastir, Nabeul, Sousse and Sfax. The region is home to more than 3.3 million people. Along with Grand Tunis, it has the vast majority of Tunisian jobs, and has a poverty rate far lower than provinces in the periphery.91

ISIS failed to mobilize fighters from the eastern coastal region at the same rate it did from hot spots like Grand Tunis and the southern border region. The eastern coastal region produced fighters at a rate of 3.4 per 100,000 residents, the lowest of all four regions, though it accounted for 19 percent of Tunisia’s fighters due to its large population.

One province, Bizerte, did not fit the multi-province classification and is examined separately in this report. It is an economically important province in Tunisia’s north, but not part of Grand Tunis. Bizerte accounted for 10 percent of Tunisia’s fighters, producing them at a rate of 10.3 fighters per 100,000 residents.

The Arab Spring and Tunisia’s Mobilization

Had it not been for the Arab Spring, the extent of open Salafi-Jihadist organizing that emerged in Tunisia would have been impossible. While in power, the Ben Ali government systematically suppressed not only militant Islamism but also moderate forms of Islamism.92 Salafi-Jihadist mobilization and indoctrination before the Arab Spring were conducted covertly.

That changed with Ben Ali’s fall. In March 2011, core leaders of the militant group Ansar al-Sharia were released from Tunisia’s prisons.93 They established themselves in the country’s economic center and the surrounding interior periphery, specifically recruiting in Tunis, Sousse, Sidi Bouzid, Kairouan and Bizerte.94 Ansar al-Sharia operated openly in the first years after the 2011
revolution, traveling the country and proselytizing for their Salafi-Jihadist views. The shift in political environment allowed the new generation of Salafi-Jihadists to engage in a form of mass politics, reaching beyond the margins of Tunisia, where prior jihadist organizing had been confined in the past. Such openness would eventually end in August 2013, when the government banned Ansar al-Sharia because of escalating violence within Tunisia that it attributed to the group.

The ISIS files suggest that Ansar al-Sharia built a foundation of recruits from which ISIS mobilized to fight in Syria. Fighters were asked who recommended them or could act as a reference for their joining ISIS, and the answers provided by Tunisian fighters revealed close connections to Ansar al-Sharia.

One example is Omar al-Ayashi, who resided in Ariana, a northern province in the greater Tunis area. On July 13, 2014, Ayashi entered Syria through Tal Abyad on the Syrian-Turkish border. Ayashi reported working with Ansar al-Sharia’s media operation, and the form noted that he had hacking skills from his work there. Ayashi also reported traveling to Algeria as a messenger and traveling to Libya for training, which he reported as jihadist experience, noting it was with Ansar al-Sharia.

Among Ayashi’s recommenders was Kamal Zarrouk, a top Ansar al-Sharia leader. Zarrouk came to prominence after 2011 as he traveled the country preaching with Ansar al-Sharia and spreading his views via social media—an activity that simply would not have been possible during Ben Ali’s rule. During a speech in May 2013, Zarrouk stated, “I would like to declare loud and clear, that the al-Nusra Front, Ansar al-Sharia, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and the mujahdeen in Somalia, Mali, and Algeria, we all stand united against our enemies.” At the time, Zarrouk was able to operate openly in Tunisia. As the conflict between the government and Ansar al-Sharia escalated, Tunisian police raided his mosque in September 2013. But Zarrouk evaded arrest and made his way to Syria, reportedly via Libya, where he was reportedly killed in 2015.

In addition to Ayashi, Zarrouk recommended one other fighter who reported entering Syria in August 2013—before Zarrouk fled Tunisia. This suggests Zarrouk was engaged in organized recruitment for ISIS from within Tunisia before departing the country.

Zarrouk is not the only individual connected to Ansar al-Sharia mentioned by Tunisian fighters as a reference. Another is Abu Omar al-Tunisi, who is listed as a recommender for 13 Tunisian fighters. Abu Omar is likely Tariq al-Harzi, born in 1981 or 1982 in Tunis. Abu Omar reportedly entered Iraq to fight in 2004 during the first phase of the Iraq war. He was arrested and held in Abu Ghraib, released, arrested again in 2008 and turned over to Iraqi custody in 2009. He was then freed in an ISIS jailbreak in 2012.

By 2013 he had begun facilitating fighter travel to Syria. ISIS named him emir for the border region between Syria and Iraq. By early 2014 he was recruiting North Africans. According to the United Nations, Abu Omar was “active in facilitating and hosting members of Ansar al-Shari’a ... in Syria.”

Abu Omar’s success in recruiting fighters from North Africa, including Tunisia, owed much to the role of his brother, Ali al-Harzi, who remained in North Africa and was a member of Ansar al-Sharia. According to the U.S. Treasury designation of Abu Omar as a foreign terrorist facilitator, he worked to smuggle arms from Libya to Syria in coordination with his brother. Ali al-Harzi, also known as Abu Zubayr, was born in Ariana, Tunisia, in 1986. His duties included recruiting foreign fighters and weapons smuggling.

The ISIS files confirm the role that the Harzi brothers played in connecting ISIS with Ansar al-Sharia networks and moving fighters to Syria. Two Tunisian fighters reported being recommended by both an Abu Omar and an Abu Zubayr, presumably the two Harzi brothers acting together. Among these fighters was Ayashi, further suggesting
the close ties between Ansar al-Sharia and Abu Omar’s recruitment and facilitation efforts. In total, 27 Tunisian fighters listed an Abu Zubayr as a recommender.\textsuperscript{112}

The 2011 fall of Muammar Ghaddafi’s government in Libya compounded the opportunities for jihadist mobilization provided by Ben Ali’s fall in Tunisia months earlier. The chaos of Libya provided new networks with which Tunisian jihadists could connect and another route that fighters could take to Syria. It also provided an ungoverned space where Tunisian jihadist networks could maintain their activities as the Tunisian government began to crack down on groups like Ansar al-Sharia.

Libya was by far the most common travel destination that Tunisian fighters reported visiting, accounting for almost 40 percent of the destinations they cited. Some of these fighters had seemingly innocent reasons: Four reported that their travel to Libya was for work, and a fifth said it occurred in 2010, before the fall of the Ghaddafi government. However, two fighters explicitly described their travel to Libya as being for militant training.

Libya’s key role in facilitating travel to Syria and sustaining Tunisian jihadist networks is also apparent in names that Tunisian fighters listed as having recommended them. A prime example is Noureddine Chouchane, also known as Sabir. Chouchane had been a senior figure in Ansar al-Sharia.\textsuperscript{113} However, he left Tunisia for Libya, reportedly on a passport issued in 2012.\textsuperscript{114}

From a training camp in Sabratha, Libya, Chouchane recruited fighters for ISIS, and according to Tunisian officials he helped prepare the March 2015 attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis that killed 22 people.\textsuperscript{115} In February 2016, the United States announced that it had conducted an airstrike targeting Chouchane and the camp, calling him an ISIS “senior facilitator in Libya” and adding, “He facilitated the movement of potential [ISIS]-affiliated foreign fighters from Tunisia to Libya and onward to other countries.”\textsuperscript{116} The strike occurred a month before ISIS used Sabratha as the staging ground for its March 2016 raid on Ben Guerdane, a Tunisian city near the Libyan border.

Fifty-one Tunisian fighters, or 8.7 percent of the Tunisian fighter contingent, listed Sabir, Abu Jihad al-Libi, or Abu Jihad al-Tunisi—which the files note as being the same person—as their recommender.

Chouchane maintained close communication with ISIS in Syria. His wife’s sister, who lived in the Sabratha camp, described direct communication between ISIS emirs in Sirte, Libya, and Syria, stating, “Each group had an emir who was working on his own strategy—some were making passports for Syria, some were working on Tunisia and others were working on Libya.” She continued, “They always asked for instructions from the emir in Syria, who told them to obey the emir in Sirte, but they refused and they took decisions by themselves.”\textsuperscript{117}

The key role of Libya as a stop along the path to Syria is confirmed by other observers’ examinations of the Tunisian fighters. According to the United Nations Working Group report on Tunisian fighters, “Testimony has documented that the routes taken entail travel through Libya, then Turkey and its border at Antakya, and then Syria.”\textsuperscript{118} One study

\textbf{The 2011 fall of Muammar Ghaddafi’s government in Libya compounded the opportunities for jihadist mobilization provided by Ben Ali’s fall in Tunisia months earlier.}
of court records from Tunisian terrorism cases found that 70 percent of accused Tunisian terrorists had passed through training camps in Libya.\footnote{199} According to Barak Barfi, a New America fellow who reported from Syria, Tunisian fighters with Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, would display passports showing short stays in Libya immediately before their travel to Turkey en route to Syria.\footnote{200}

**Pitfalls in Assessing Tunisia's Widespread Mobilization**

In Tunisia, ISIS mobilized fighters from across the country, including members of the professional classes. The mobilization was also unprecedented in size, largely due to the role of the Arab Spring.

However, this poses a challenge for analysts of jihadism in Tunisia. Because the mobilization was so large, it is easy to find a Tunisian fighter, or at least someone who knows one, from any part of Tunisian society to interview. As a result, theories based on selected interviews with accessible fighters face selection bias on atypical examples, such as wealthy or professional fighters, or those who argue more vocally for the power of ISIS’ ideology. These interviews lack context for the broader conditions of a population-level analysis that considers patterns of underemployment, lack of representation and poor service provision, and their role in ISIS’ ability to recruit.

It is a common refrain among those who have examined terrorism in Tunisia that almost every Tunisian knows someone who went to fight in Syria.\footnote{211} Unlike in Libya, where only two provinces accounted for more than three-quarters of the country’s fighter contingent in the ISIS files, in Tunisia only the province of Tunis produced more than 10 percent of the fighter contingent, and mobilization occurred throughout the country, as can be seen in Figure 8. Yet while fighters came from across the country, they did not come from every part of the country at the same per capita rate, as can be seen Figure 9. The way the hot spots of recruitment correspond with conditions of marginalization is discussed in the next section.

Tunisian fighters, or those who know them, can also be found from across Tunisia’s socioeconomic spectrum. A United Nations review of Tunisian foreign fighters states, “Some of these young persons come from poor socio-economic

### Table 6: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores in Tunisia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>2.2 (1.7)</td>
<td>1.8 (1.5)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.4 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.1 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.9 (1.1)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.7 (1.1)</td>
<td>1.6 (1.0)</td>
<td>1.5 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.3 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.0 (0.9)</td>
<td>2.0 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Birth Year</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 8: Percentage of Tunisian ISIS Recruitment by Province

Figure 9: Per Capita ISIS Recruitment in Tunisia by Province
backgrounds yet there are also some who are from middle class and wealthier parts of society ... making for significantly diverse profiles of foreign fighters.”

There is a range of profiles among the Tunisian fighters who joined ISIS. The median Tunisian fighter was born in 1988, but eight percent were born prior to the 1980s. Of those whose marital status is known, 82 percent were unmarried, but 18 percent were married — most of whom reported having children. Eleven percent of Tunisian fighters reported professional, military, government or advanced skills work.

However, the existence of numerous cases of fighters from wealthier classes is not a sign of a particularly wealthy fighter contingent. In fact, Tunisian fighters have a lower mean marital score than ISIS fighters overall — 1.6 compared to 2.2 (see Table 6). North African fighters as a whole had a mean marital score of 1.8. Tunisian fighters also had a mean prior employment score of 2.4, slightly below the score for ISIS fighters as a whole and North African fighters — both of which were 2.5.

That ISIS recruitment in Tunisia was a mobilization of the underemployed and a struggling working class, despite examples of professionals who joined ISIS, is made clear by an examination of the employment statuses that Tunisian fighters reported.

While 11 percent of Tunisian fighters reported professional, military, government or advanced skills work, 49 percent, more than four times as many, reported being underemployed. Those who reported being unemployed, working in day labor, or in agriculture (included among the 49 percent categorized as under-employed) comprised 20 percent of Tunisia’s fighters — almost twice as many as reported advanced levels of employment. Thirty-seven percent of Tunisian fighters reported having blue-collar work or being traders. The remainder left the question blank or replied in a way that was unclear. This breakdown resembles that of ISIS fighters overall, among whom 46 percent reported being underemployed and 16 percent reported professional, military, government or advanced skills work.

In the Tunisian context, it is essential to recognize the broader role of underemployment and not simply focus on the rate of self-reported unemployment among fighters. A March 2015 OECD report noted that “high unemployment rates give only a partial view of the poor labour-market outcomes in Tunisia: ... informality affects one in three workers in the private non-agricultural sector and one in two in the private agricultural sector.”

In rural areas, day labor contracts remain the predominant form of contract, and are associated with discontent. Similarly, it takes a Tunisian university graduate on average six years to find stable employment and by age 35 half remain unemployed. In 2011, 29.2 percent of those with university-level educations were unemployed.

In addition, the large number of blue-collar workers should not be interpreted as evidence of a strong middle class aligned with the professional class. It is instead more likely that in the post-revolutionary environment of 2013 through 2014, blue-collar workers perceived their position as closer to or in danger of becoming that of the underemployed than that of the professional class. A 2014 Pew Research survey found that 88 percent of Tunisians considered the country’s economic situation to be bad, and a majority considered it very bad. A 2013 International Republican Institute survey found similar pessimism regarding the Tunisian economy, driven in large part by concerns over unemployment. Tunisia’s Arab Spring revolution followed a period in which Tunisian perceptions of economic well-being and the power of entrepreneurship as a route to economic stability declined substantially, even while classical economic measures like GDP per capita improved. Gallup warned of a “a silo-like focus on assessing the economic and social health of developing countries through classical economic measures alone” and noted “a growing sense of frustration among Tunisians with the challenges they face in reaping the benefits of a country.
hailed as an example of quick social progress and economic growth.”

Some analysts have argued for the role of ideological drivers that extend beyond material and economic concerns—without obscuring the role of patterns of marginalization—in enabling the power of ideology. For example, in his book *Islamic Exceptionalism*, Shadi Hamid, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, recounts an interview with a Tunisian filmmaker whose cousin had joined ISIS in Syria. The filmmaker told Hamid, “I am against his decision, but I respect it.” Hamid’s interview illustrated the way jihadism permeated much of Tunisian society and, to some extent, crossed class lines.

Yet, Hamid is careful to note how the diversity of jihadism’s appeal was fueled by and intertwined with poor economic conditions and lack of political representation, writing that Tunisian Salafism drew “strength from the forgotten suburbs of Tunis and impoverished cities like Kairouan. It wasn’t so much the government or its policies that were the problem; it was an entire structure of power that left them voiceless, in economic, political, as well as religious terms.”

Other descriptions of ISIS mobilization in Tunisia have been far less careful, instead portraying it as a middle-class phenomenon based on a small number of cases, and as a result obscuring the patterns that defined the mobilization. One example is a Reuters report titled “The Middle-Class Killers of Tunisia” and subtitled “The Islamists who attacked the national museum were far from poor or marginalised.” It drew upon the cases of two perpetrators of the March 2015 attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis; an interview with a family from the relatively wealthy province of Sousse regarding their son, a football player who left to fight in Syria; and a report of a family that left for Syria from the well-off island of Djerba. The effect was to downplay the role of marginalization in Tunisia’s ISIS mobilization.

Analysts must be careful to not overemphasize the atypical cases of wealthy or professional Tunisians. Tunisia’s mobilization was not primarily one of the professional class, but rather of the underemployed and a struggling working class.

**Marginalization and ISIS Mobilization in Tunisia**

ISIS most frequently recruited fighters from the economic and political margins of Tunisia. Grand Tunis and the southern border region produced fighters at rates (8.1 and 6.3 per 100,000 residents, respectively) greater than the average of 5.4 across Tunisia. In Grand Tunis, fighters disproportionately came from the region’s poor and excluded suburbs, while the southern border region has long been on the margins of Tunisia’s politics and economy. In contrast, the wealthy eastern coast, home to much of the Tunisian elite, produced fighters a rate below the national rate.

Grand Tunis is the prosperous capital region of the country, and home to 44 percent of the firms responsible for the vast majority of Tunisia’s private sector jobs. In 2014, with the exception of the province of Manouba, all of Grand Tunis’ component provinces had unemployment rates below that of Tunisia overall.

While 11 percent of Tunisian fighters reported professional, military, government or advanced skills work, 49 percent, more than four times as many, reported being underemployed.
Yet Grand Tunis has substantial inequalities of wealth. Valentina Colombo, a senior fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy, notes that “when the so-called greater Tunis area is considered, peripheries are to be found.” One example in Grand Tunis is the neighborhood of Ettadhamen, in Ariana province, which has an unemployment rate comparable to those in the peripheral areas that have been commonly viewed as hot spots of recruitment.\textsuperscript{137}

ISIS fighters who reported residing in Grand Tunis came disproportionately from such poorer, marginalized areas. Eleven percent of fighters from Grand Tunis reported residing in Ettadhamen. The neighborhood produced fighters at a rate of 27.6 fighters per 100,000 residents—more than three times the rate in Grand Tunis overall.\textsuperscript{138}

Ettadhamen is much poorer than the rest of Grand Tunis. In 2014, its unemployment rate was 17 percent, more than 6 points higher than Ariana’s overall unemployment rate and above the rate in Tunisia overall.\textsuperscript{139} Low-wage and short-term contracts predominate among young men in Ettadhamen, who as a result “remain excluded from all the benefits of social citizenship (such as health insurance, social protection, community facilities), and deprived of access to cultural or leisure infrastructures,” as Olfa Lamloum, International Alert’s country manager for Tunisia, wrote in report based on interviews and focus groups in Ettadhamen and nearby Douar Hicher.\textsuperscript{140}

This poverty is reflected in the ISIS fighters from Ettadhamen, who reported a history of unreliable employment. Of these fighters, 65 percent reported being underemployed: 35 percent reported unemployment, day labor or agricultural work, while 30 percent reported being students or unskilled laborers. In comparison, 49 percent of all fighters from Tunisia reported underemployment. Fighters from Ettadhamen reported the same average prior employment score (2.0) as fighters from Kebili, the province in Tunisia with the highest rate of ISIS recruitment.

The overall employment and educational statuses reported by fighters from Grand Tunis support the conclusion that they were generally not from wealthy areas of the region. The majority of fighters from Grand Tunis reported being underemployed, and 20 percent reported being unemployed or working as day laborers. Fighters from Grand Tunis had a mean prior employment score of 2.4, the same as that of fighters from Tunisia overall. This is surprising, because even though Grand Tunis sits in Tunisia’s economic center, the fighters who came from Grand Tunis do not appear wealthy.

Many fighters from Grand Tunis came from the region’s blue-collar workforce, with 35 percent reporting such work. However, only 10 percent of fighters from Grand Tunis reported professional, advanced skills or government work. These percentages resemble those of Tunisia overall. The class dynamic among fighters in Grand Tunis, like that of Tunisian fighters overall, is one of a large underemployed population and a struggling working class with only occasional cases of middle- and upper-class fighters.

The conclusion that fighters from Grand Tunis tended not to come from the region’s wealthier areas is supported by other examinations of jihadists in Tunis. The International Crisis Group, for example, reports that most individuals charged with terrorism crimes in Tunis came from its peripheral suburbs and were likely recent arrivals from peripheral and economically depressed provinces.\textsuperscript{141}

Tunisia’s southern border region provides a more traditional example of economic and political marginalization. With 92 percent of private sector jobs located in Grand Tunis or along its coast, Tunisia’s southern border region lacks the professional middle class and representation in the economic elite that can be found in Grand Tunis or the coastal provinces.\textsuperscript{142} In 2014, unemployment was higher than the national rate in every province in the southern border region, ranging from 15 to 27 percent.\textsuperscript{143}
These poor economic conditions are particularly clear in Kebili, the top per capita producer of fighters in Tunisia and the second highest in North Africa. In 2014, according to the census, Kebili had an unemployment rate of 21 percent, the fifth worst among Tunisia’s 24 provinces. More than 70 percent of fighters from Kebili were underemployed, a percentage similar to that reported for Derna, Libya, the top per capita producer of foreign ISIS fighters in North Africa. Moreover, 41 percent of fighters from Kebili reported being unemployed, working in agriculture or day labor. Kebili has a mean prior employment score of 2.0, below the mean score of 2.4 for Tunisia as a whole.

Not only did fighters from Kebili report poor employment histories, but they were well educated, making such poor employment statuses a particularly strong sign of the gap between residents’ aspirations and their economic opportunities. Fighters from Kebili reported a mean educational attainment score of 3.5, higher than the mean score for Tunisia as a whole and the highest mean score among Tunisian provinces where 10 or more fighters reported residing.

Bilqasim al-Marmouri, the spokesman for the Union of the Unemployed in Kebili, told Al Jazeera that residents of Kebili were drawn to ISIS and other militant groups by promises of salaries and escape from unemployment.

The province of Tataouine, which sits to Kebili’s south bordering Libya and Algeria, and which produced fighters at a rate of 6.8 per 100,000 residents, presents a similar situation to that found in Kebili. In 2014, the unemployment rate in Tataouine was 27 percent. Fighters in Tataouine reported a mean prior employment score of 1.8. Of the 10 fighters who reported residing in Tataouine, seven were underemployed, of whom three were day laborers and two were unemployed. The remaining three had blue collar jobs.

Medenine, which sits to Tataouine’s east and produced fighters at a rate of 6.1 per 100,000 residents, also showed signs of economic stress. And, as with Grand Tunis, fighters were not uniformly distributed throughout the province.

More than 40 percent of Medenine’s fighters came from Ben Guerdane, which produced fighters at a rate of 15.2 per 100,000 residents, almost 2.5 times the rate of the province as a whole.

In 2014, Ben Guerdane had an unemployment rate of about 19 percent, higher than that of Medenine overall. Local figures in Ben Guerdane connect the flow of residents to ISIS with their economic plight. Salem Chouat, an 80-year-old former mayor of Ben Guerdane, told the Washington Post in 2016, “Because of the poverty and the marginalization, the youth of Ben Guerdane find themselves with no options to remain here,” continuing, “At the same time, they meet with ISIS recruiters who promise lots of money.”

Similarly, Radwan Azlook, a local trade union coordinator, told Al-Monitor, “The number of unemployed youth with no university degrees is much larger than that of the holders of university degrees. Although there are always exceptions, this [large group] is more likely to join jihadist groups or opt for illegal migration.”

Fighters from Medenine, including Ben Guerdane, did not suffer the same level of underemployment as fighters from other parts of the southern border region. Only 41 percent reported being underemployed. Medenine had a mean prior employment score of 2.5, slightly above Tunisia’s overall mean prior employment score.

Like Libya, the parts of Tunisia that produced the highest rates of fighters also had histories of militancy and protest that predated ISIS.
However, this should not be understood as evidence of a middle-class mobilization in Medenine because the province, and Ben Guerdane in particular, is home to a labor market where even those who report employment face unstable or unreliable work and professional work is almost nonexistent. The town is heavily reliant on legal and illicit trade across the Libyan border. One field study in Ben Guerdane found that almost one in five residents who were interviewed reported work in the illegal sector, and only two in three reported being covered by social security.

Chouat, the former mayor of Ben Guerdane, linked the smuggling economy to economic marginalization and ISIS mobilization, saying of young underemployed men, “Their choice is either smuggling or ISIS.” Sharif Zaytooni, a local journalist, similarly downplayed the economic status of those employed in Ben Guerdane’s trading economy, telling Al-Monitor, “Most of these men work for businessmen and are paid at the end of each day for transporting these goods. These fees are low when considering the harassment that workers are exposed to in Libya, where some of them get kidnapped or are ill-treated at the hands of armed groups there.” In addition, the trading/smuggling economy is dependent on an open border, which particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring uprising in Libya was often not the case.

Though it is difficult to determine exactly the nature of the work that fighters reported, the employment statuses they gave to ISIS officials suggest that Medenine’s better than average job score is merely the result of this trading/smuggling economy and should not be understood as evidence of a middle-class recruitment. While Medenine had a relatively low percentage of underemployed fighters for Tunisia, only one fighter reported being employed in professional, advanced skills, government or military work—a salesman. Instead, 15 of Medenine’s fighters reported blue-collar work or being traders. Of these 15 fighters, eight reported being traders, a business highly likely to be part of the province’s smuggling economy, and an additional fighter explicitly reported being a fuel smuggler. Of the remaining six blue-collar fighters who were not traders, there was a butcher, a plumber, a beverage maker, a mechanic and two electricians.

Only one fighter who reported residing in Medenine came from the wealthier island of Djerba, where unemployment ranged from 9 to 10 percent.

In contrast with Grand Tunis and the southern border region, Tunisia’s wealthy eastern coast produced fighters at a rate of only 3.4 per 100,000 residents—below the national rate. The eastern coast has long benefited from government investment that privileged it over the southern border and interior, and has a lower poverty rate than Tunisia’s interior or southern periphery. In 2014, unemployment was below Tunisia’s national rate in every coastal province, and in two provinces it was below 10 percent.

Fighters from the eastern coastal region reflect the region’s relative wealth compared to other regions of Tunisia. They had a mean job score of 2.7, above that of Tunisia overall. Only 37 percent reported being underemployed, and only 12 percent reported being unemployed, working in day labor or agricultural work. Unlike Medenine, where almost no fighters reported being employed in professional, advanced skills, government or military work, 17 percent of fighters from the coast reported such work.

**Prior Militancy and Protest in Tunisia’s ISIS Mobilization**

Like Libya, the parts of Tunisia that produced the highest rates of fighters also had histories of militancy and protest that predated ISIS. ISIS generated an unprecedented surge in recruitment, but it was drawing upon populations that were already rebelling against the status quo conditions in Tunisia. This was particularly the case in the poor suburbs of Grand Tunis, the southern border region and the southern provinces of Tunisia’s interior. In contrast, Tunisia’s wealthy eastern coast, which had fewer fighters relative to the
country’s overall average, lacked the same history of protest and jihadism as the hot spots of fighter mobilization.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) measured protests and riots in each of Tunisia’s provinces from 2011 through 2014. ACLED defines a protest as “a non-violent, group public demonstration, often against a government institution” and rioting as “a violent form of demonstration.” We use these events – referred to here as protest events but inclusive of riots—indexed to population as a proxy for a history of protest.

The multi-province region with highest rate of ISIS recruitment also had the highest frequency of protest events Grand Tunis (8.1 fighters per 100,000 residents) had a rate of 21 protest events per 100,000 residents.

The southern border region, another hotspot of recruitment, (6.3 fighters per 100,000 residents) had a lower but still relatively high rate of 11 protest events per 100,000 residents. It is worth noting, however, that in 2015 and 2016 numerous protests and riots broke out across the southern border area – likely indicating latent tension with the government – making it the region with the highest rate of protest events if the period from 2011 through 2016 is examined as a whole.

In contrast, Tunisia’s multi-province region with the lowest rate of ISIS recruitment had a much lower rate of protest events. Tunisia’s eastern coast (3.4 fighters per 100,000 residents) had only 4 protest events per 100,000 residents. The coastal region is home to much of Tunisia’s elite, which has viewed protest and militancy in Tunisia’s south as a cause for fear.

The interior periphery region (3.8 fighters per 100,000 residents) had 11 protest events per 100,000 residents similar to the southern border region despite its lower rate of fighter production.

However, the history of protest in the interior periphery region highlights the relationship between ISIS recruitment and previous unrest. Protest events were only about 60 percent as likely in the northern half of this region (eight events per 100,000) than in the southern half (14 events per 100,000). This correlated with the division in this region in terms of the rates of ISIS fighters: 1.3 fighters per 100,000 residents reported coming from the north and 5.6 fighters per 100,000 residents reported coming from the south.

Bizerte appears to be an exception. This province, which does not fit into the division of Tunisia used in this paper, had a high rate of fighter recruitment (10.3 fighters per 100,000 residents) and a low rate of protest (3 events per 100,000 residents). Bizerte may thus challenge the view of a relationship between levels of protest and ISIS recruitment, suggesting that the relationship is more complex. Another potential explanation, however, is that Bizerte’s recruitment and protest levels were shaped by internal inequality, with parts of the province being sites of protest and recruitment while more populated areas remained relatively quiet on both fronts. In any case, fighters from Bizerte did not provide sufficient local detail for a neighborhood-level analysis of recruitment.

The internal divisions we believe may exist in Bizerte are more apparent when other recruitment hot spots are examined at the city and neighborhood level. Such hot spots of recruitment appear to have particularly strong histories of protest. Anecdotally, neighborhoods like Ettadhamen in Grand Tunis were the first hubs of protest activity when the Arab Spring protests reached Tunis, and focus groups conducted with youths in Ettadhamen and the nearby poor suburb of Douar Hicher found that more than 28 percent of those interviewed reported having participated in street protests since 2011.

Militancy is also an issue in these areas. Before the Arab Spring, Ettadhamen had been a bastion of Islamist politics, was heavily policed by the security services including two units of the national guard despite its small size, and was the home of many
of Tunisia’s political prisoners during the 1990s. According to William Lawrence, former North Africa director for the International Crisis Group and now a professor at George Washington University, “Throughout the Ettadhamen quarter you can find after 2011 a sort of latent and aspirational jihadism that reveres those willing to take up arms against a dictator.” These are the neighborhoods of Grand Tunis that disproportionately generated the capital region’s ISIS recruits.

Grand Tunis was also represented in prior terrorist mobilizations to fight in Iraq. Among the 19 Tunisian fighters in the Sinjar records who reported their hometown, 13 reported residing in Grand Tunis and four in the neighboring province of Bizerte. The presence of fighters from Bizerte in the Sinjar records may suggest that while Bizerte lacked a high rate of protest as measured by ACLED, it did have a history of militancy that ISIS could draw upon. It is worth noting that Bizerte was among the locations that Ansar al-Sharia first targeted in the wake of the 2011 protests, perhaps an important factor in its role as a hub of recruitment. These data points also suggest that protest rates drawn from ACLED are likely imperfect measures of whether a community has a history of protest and militancy.

In the southern border area, the reliance on smuggling gave rise to persistent protests—often resulting in violence—over border closures. This region historically has also been a site of jihadist activity and recruitment. Ben Guerdane, in particular, provided fighters for jihadist campaigns in Bosnia, Afghanistan and the early insurgency in Iraq. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the deceased leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, which became ISIS, is said to have commented on Ben Guerdane’s early support of al-Qaeda in Iraq, “If Ben Guerdane had been located next to Fallujah, we would have liberated Iraq.”

The southern provinces of the interior periphery also have a history of terrorism and protest before their provision of fighters to ISIS. It was in the interior periphery province of Sidi Bouzid that Mohammed Bouazizi’s self-immolation sparked the Arab Spring. According to Tarek Kahlouj, the director of the Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies who formerly advised Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki, it was “not just by chance that the Tunisian revolution [in 2011] started in these border regions.” The province of Kasserine, in the southern part of Tunisia’s interior periphery, was the site of much of the violence conducted by Ansar al-Sharia and other militants in the wake of the Arab Spring, as they took advantage of the border with Algeria and the mountainous Jebel Chaambi area. Like Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine experienced substantial protests during the Arab Spring, and economic protests continued to break out after the fall of the Ben Ali government. In some of those protests, slogans regarding jobs mixed with slogans supporting ISIS, according to Mohamed Zorgui, a community activist interviewed by the Washington Post.

ISIS recruited from across Tunisia, yet the hot spots of ISIS recruitment—whether in Tunisia’s southern border areas, in the poor suburbs of Tunis or along the border with Algeria—had long chafed at economic marginalization and political exclusion. That anger led fighters from Grand Tunis and the southern border to join prior terrorist mobilizations, helped spark the Arab Spring and fueled the growth of Ansar al-Sharia, many of whose leaders ISIS later subsumed into its recruitment efforts. It is essential to understand the specific appeal of ISIS to Tunisians and its theological and political intricacies, but focusing on ISIS’ particular propaganda pitch risks missing the way the group built upon a growing anger in Tunisia that found multiple expressions—of which ISIS was only the latest. In that way, ISIS recruitment in Tunisia looks similar to ISIS recruitment in Libya.
Three patterns characterized the ISIS mobilization in the Arabian Peninsula. First, in contrast with ISIS foreign fighters from North Africa, fighters from the Arabian Peninsula represented a new and distinct jihadist movement as compared to prior mobilizations for jihadist conflicts. Second, the areas with the highest rates of producing ISIS foreign fighters were connected to local economic and political elites. Third, security measures in the Arabian Peninsula before the 2013-14 mobilization did not address the underlying motivations for those joining ISIS. For a table on fighters’ subnational origins in the Arabian Peninsula, see Appendix IV.

1. ISIS fighters from the Arabian Peninsula represented a new and distinct jihadist movement. While in North Africa, key hot spots of ISIS mobilization had long histories of militancy, in the Arabian Peninsula, ISIS mobilized a new set of fighters who had not joined al-Qaeda’s previous terrorist campaigns. This is likely because ISIS represents a different phenomenon in the Arabian Peninsula than al-Qaeda does: Rather than a secretive organization based on a relatively abstract notion of confrontation with the so-called West, ISIS was an accessible and inclusive organization designed to construct a new society. Fighters from the Arabian Peninsula joining ISIS were younger and less experienced in jihad than the overall sample of fighters, and came from different regions of Saudi Arabia than in previous mobilizations.

First, fighters from the Arabian Peninsula were not only younger than the median ISIS fighter, but they were also less likely to have reported participating in a previous jihad compared to ISIS fighters overall (see Table 7). The median ISIS fighter from the Arabian Peninsula was born in 1990, making him 23 or 24 at the time he entered Syria. This suggests that ISIS fighters from the region were unlikely to be veterans of previous terrorist campaigns in Iraq, as many of them would have been too young to have participated in the first phases of the Iraq insurgency. The median ISIS fighter in our analysis was born in 1989. Although the difference is only one year, the Arabian Peninsula’s population is older on average than any other region of Muslim-majority countries, suggesting this trend is distinct and non-accidental. Moreover, 10 percent of the overall sample reported having participated in a previous jihad, whereas only 4 percent of fighters from the Arabian Peninsula reported previous jihadist experience.

The provinces where ISIS recruited at the highest rates within the Arabian Peninsula also tended to have the most youthful populations. The three regions of the Arabian Peninsula with the highest per capita recruitment and ten or more fighters...
### Table 7: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores in the Arabian Peninsula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores (Standard Dev.)</th>
<th>All ISIS Files (N=3,577)</th>
<th>Arabian Peninsula (N=844)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>2.2 (1.7)</td>
<td>1.8 (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.6 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.1 (1.1)</td>
<td>3.5 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.7 (1.1)</td>
<td>1.9 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.3 (1.1)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Birth Year</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8: Top Provinces of Origin for ISIS Foreign Fighters in the Arabian Peninsula (Per Capita)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province (Country)</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province (min 10)</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Muharraq (Bahrain)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>117,884</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Qassim (Saudi Arabia)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>991,032</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Hail (Saudi Arabia)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>529,012</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>4,579,570</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Tabouk (Saudi Arabia)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>710,699</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were Muharraq in Bahrain (19 fighters per 100,000 local Sunni Muslim residents), and Qassim (13.8 per 100,000) and Hail in Saudi Arabia (5.9 per 100,000). These provinces had some of the most youthful populations in the region: As a proportion of the general population, those ages 15-24 in Muharraq comprised 193 of every 1,000 local national residents, with similarly high numbers in Qassim (197 per 1,000) and Hail (194 per 1,000).  

A regression that includes these provinces and all other provinces in the region with 10 or more fighters showed a strongly positive bivariate correlation between provinces with high fighter rates and those with youthful populations (see Figure 10). This was the strongest positive bivariate correlation between fighter rates and a variety of predictive variables, including previous involvement in jihadist campaigns and economic well-being (see Figure 10).  

Finally, a geographic breakdown of ISIS fighters from the Arabian Peninsula compared to mobilizations for al-Qaeda indicates that fighters came from new parts of the region. This suggests that ISIS fighters from the Arabian Peninsula were neither veterans of previous jihadist campaigns nor the latest generation of fighters from the same communities that produced fighters for prior mobilizations (e.g., in comparison to Derna, Libya, which may have an intergenerational jihadist recruitment issue). It further suggests that ISIS drew upon individuals with different motivations than those of al-Qaeda. This is true in three countries in the region: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Yemen.

In Saudi Arabia, the focal point of foreign fighter recruitment shifted from the coastal areas of Mecca and Medina to the country's interior region, known as the Nejd, which covers the capital Riyadh and the adjacent provinces of Qassim and Hail (see Figure 11). The Nejd is the Wahhabi heartland of the country—an extremely socially conservative region for which the ISIS message of state-building likely had more resonance than notions of geopolitical contest presented by al-Qaeda (e.g., to combat the “far enemy”). ISIS recruited far more fighters from the Nejdi interior than from the coastal regions in the east and west, where al-Qaeda’s recruits had predominantly come from in the past (explained in detail in the section on Saudi Arabia).

In Bahrain, fighters had not joined jihadist mobilizations in large numbers before ISIS: There are no Bahrainis in the Sinjar Papers, and only six Bahrainis were reportedly detained at Guantanamo Bay. Yet ISIS managed to mobilize Bahrainis to travel to join ISIS. It recruited more fighters from the Bahraini province of Muharraq alone (19) than al-Qaeda and other groups had in all previous recorded mobilizations. “There was solidarity with the Muslim community in [jihadi] conflicts,” explained Husain Abdulla, executive director of Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, “but not the departure of Bahrainis to these conflicts. This is different.”

ISIS not only recruited fighters from locales that had previously not been centers of fighter mobilization, but it also failed to recruit fighters from areas with long-standing jihadist traditions. In particular, ISIS failed to mobilize Yemenis to join the group. Only 26 fighters who joined ISIS in 2013-14 reported residing in Yemen.

Yet Yemen had been a hot spot of prior jihadist mobilization. In the Sinjar Papers, a sample with roughly 590 names, about one-sixth the size of the ISIS files, there were 1.6 times as many fighters claiming Yemen as their country of residence. The leaked Guantanamo files, covering 774 detainees, showed 110 Yemenis being held, more than four times as many as were recorded joining ISIS, even though the ISIS files cover more than 3,500 individuals. ISIS’ failure to mobilize Yemenis is particularly telling, as Yemen was home to an active al-Qaeda affiliate during the 2013-14 period. While the research on the mobilization of Yemeni foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq is limited, one report suggested that several hundred Yemenis had left for Iraq and Syria, the majority of whom joined Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, the al-Qaeda-linked group in Syria. One explanation for why Yemenis might
Figure 10: Regressions of Top Provinces of Origin of ISIS Fighters in the Arabian Peninsula

**ISIS MOBILIZATION BY PROVINCE VS. YOUTH POPULATION BY PROVINCE**

![Graph showing the regression of youth population by province vs. ISIS foreign fighter rate by province. The x-axis represents the ISIS foreign fighter rate by province, while the y-axis represents the youth population aged 15-24 in the province per 1,000 population. The data points are scattered along a line of best fit, indicating a positive correlation.]

**ISIS MOBILIZATION BY PROVINCE VS. ECONOMIC WELLBEING BY PROVINCE**

![Graph showing the regression of economic wellbeing by province vs. ISIS foreign fighter rate by province. The x-axis represents the ISIS foreign fighter rate by province, while the y-axis represents the household monthly spending per province in Saudi Riyals. The data points are scattered along a line of best fit, indicating a negative correlation.]

**ISIS MOBILIZATION BY PROVINCE VS. HISTORICAL JIHADIST MOBILIZATION BY PROVINCE**

![Graph showing the regression of historical jihadist mobilization by province vs. ISIS foreign fighter rate by province. The x-axis represents the ISIS foreign fighter rate by province, while the y-axis represents the historical foreign fighter rate per 100k. The data points are scattered along a line of best fit, indicating a positive correlation.]

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not be represented in these ISIS files is that they took an overland route via Saudi Arabia and Jordan into Syria. But this is unlikely, not only because Jordan and Saudi Arabia police their northern borders carefully, but also because, as Yemen expert Farea Al-Muslimi explains: “[As a Yemeni], you can easily get visas to Turkey and go. ... It was very easy—there was a daily flight.” ISIS’ failure to co-opt al-Qaeda in Yemen shows how powerful al-Qaeda remains in the Arabian Peninsula’s southernmost country. But it also supports a broader point: that ISIS did not overtake the al-Qaeda jihadist network in the Arabian Peninsula, but developed a new one.

2. ISIS fighter recruits came from regions with elite-level political connections. This is true in the cases of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait—particularly in Qassim, in Saudi Arabia, and Muharraq, in Bahrain, the two provinces with the highest per capita ISIS foreign fighter rates in the Arabian Peninsula.

In Saudi Arabia, Qassim is a crucial region of support for the royal family and its residents are often given cabinet-level positions, particularly in finance and infrastructure. For 20 years, from 1996 to 2016, the Saudi minister of finance was Ibrahim Abdulaziz al-Assaf, from a small town on the outskirts of Burayda, the capital of Qassim. His counterpart in the Ministry of Economy and Planning, Muhammed al-Jasser, who previously served as the kingdom’s central bank governor, was also from Qassim. And the powerful al-Hamdan family, which includes Abdullah al-Hamdan, Saudi Arabia’s first finance minister and confidant of the country’s founder, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, is from Qassim’s second city of Unayzah. These interlinked tribal and regional connections to high-level positions in the Saudi government not only provide jobs to Qassim as part of a system patronage, they also indicate Qassim’s greater level of favor with the ruling family. Qassim has also traditionally been a center of conservative Islamist theology in Saudi Arabia, most famously in the case of Hamoud al Aqla al-Shuaybi, a cleric born in Qassim whose fatwas have been used in support of al-Qaeda and other terrorist activities as part of what was known as the Shuaybi School.

In Bahrain, the fighters who left to join ISIS also came from communities with connections to political and economic elites. Turki al-Binali, a top ISIS ideologue who was killed in a May 2017 airstrike, and his cousin Mohammed al-Binali, were part of a prominent family in the region of Muharraq with close ties to the ruling family. They are listed in the files, along with Turki’s brother Abdullah, and were central to the recruitment of Bahrain’s foreign fighters. Turki al-Binali was listed as a reference by 17 of 27 ISIS fighters who joined from Bahrain. In addition, during the Arab Spring, Muharraq was at the center of state-organized counterrevolutionary demonstrations that sought to undermine the country’s majority Shi’a population. The Bahraini royal family relies on Muharraq to help shore up its power, and needs many of the tribes in the area to remain loyal to it. As a result, these tribes have access to government jobs. Aside from Turki and Mohammed al-Binali, one-quarter of the Bahraini ISIS fighters reported working for the government. That the regime relies on these communities for support is, it is argued by Bahraini dissident Ala’a Shehabi, why a pro-al-Qaeda protest in 2013 in front of the U.S. embassy in Manama went on for hours without state intervention.

In Kuwait, politically active Salafist movements are economically wealthy and connected, including the subset of Salafists who promote jihad. In the data on Kuwaiti ISIS fighters, they are generally older, more likely to be married, travel frequently, have better jobs and generally report more religious knowledge than the average ISIS fighter. Of the Kuwaitis who joined ISIS, many had specialized skills: four out of 25 reported military experience, another was an engineer, three others worked in government ministries, and another two worked in the oil industry. One example is Abu Jandal al-Kuwaiti, who was the group’s second-in-command for military affairs in Syria before being killed in an airstrike. Abu Jandal al-Kuwaiti was influential among fighters in the Arabian Peninsula. He is cited as a reference by at least one fighter from Saudi
Arabia and four from Bahrain. This cross-national influence reveals that Kuwaiti Salafi-Jihadist elites shaped not only Kuwaiti mobilization but also that of other countries in the region.

Another Kuwaiti with specialized skills is Ali Omar Mohammad al-Osaimi, from the province of Farwaniya, who was trained by the U.K. navy and had worked with the Kuwaiti state-owned oil company as an engineer before joining ISIS in 2014. Al-Osaimi was in charge of ISIS’ oil production in Raqqa for over a year before being arrested in 2016. He and his brother were recruited by their mother, who was employed at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education before working with the wives and sons of ISIS fighters, motivating them “psychologically and intellectually,” according to the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry.

Salafist movements in Kuwait are embedded in the country’s political power structure, according to a 2014 study by Zoltan Pall. Pall found that, in particular, Salafism had penetrated Kuwait’s economic elite in a “unique way,” becoming politically active “at a time when Salafis elsewhere were mostly preoccupied with personal beliefs and religious practice.” Partly as a result of this history of politically connected Salafis in Kuwait, the former U.S. Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence described Kuwait as “the epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria.” According to Elizabeth Dickinson, a reporter who profiled Kuwaiti terrorism financing in 2013: “The Kuwaiti Salafist community is more socially integrated and politically powerful [than in other countries in the region]. Being a Salafi is not shunned—in fact, it is good for business.”

3. Counterterrorism efforts in the Arabian Peninsula did not address the underlying motivations for ISIS’ mobilization. Security services in the Arabian Peninsula focused on disrupting al-Qaeda’s networks and arresting individuals plotting domestic terrorism. But this narrow focus allowed the Salafi-Jihadist ideology behind ISIS’ recruitment to continue to expand unimpeded. Unlike in North Africa, where revolutions were needed to provide militant Islamists the political opportunity for ideological outreach, in the Arabian Peninsula such preaching could occur unimpeded within the existing political structure.

Saudi Arabia cracked down on supporters of al-Qaeda after the group launched a series of attacks targeting the government and foreigners starting in 2003. The security response to the domestic al-Qaeda threat resulted in the creation of a special criminal court in Riyadh to try those arrested for terrorism; one study found that the number of suspects arrested and tried in the court was in the thousands. While the security response was generally successful in preventing attacks, according to Angela Gendron, a terrorism and national security professor at Carleton University, it was weak in policies that “address the rising number of extremists within [Saudi Arabia’s] own population who are potential recruits for terrorism.”

Gendron noted in 2010 that “the future effectiveness of Saudi security and counter-radicalization efforts will very much depend upon whether real reforms can be achieved with the
acceptance, if not the approval, of the conservative religious majority.”

The Saudi state crackdown in the lead-up to the ISIS mobilizations may have prevented attacks within the kingdom, but hardly redirected the country’s underlying dynamics of radicalization. Moreover, as Lori Plotkin Boghardt, a Persian Gulf expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, explained, the state security response is more active when there is a perceived domestic security threat, rather than a risk of radicalized individuals participating in conflicts abroad. Therefore, ISIS foreign fighters leaving the kingdom for Syria were less of a priority in the period 2013-14 than they were after ISIS launched attacks in the country starting in 2015.

In Bahrain, ideological outreach also continued relatively unimpeded by security measures. Violent sectarianism, an ideological strand embraced by ISIS and, in particular, by former top ideologue Turki al-Binali, who is among the Bahraini fighters in the files examined here, was common at all levels of society. As will be discussed in the forthcoming Bahrain section, political elites sanctioned the use of violence against Shi’a domestically with rhetoric similar to that used by ISIS to recruit fighters to attack the Shi’a-led Syrian and Iraqi governments. The nature of Bahraini politics is that the ruling family faces a challenge from the Shi’a communities as well as the Salafist ones, but only has the capability to address the former challenge at the expense of having to ally with the latter one. As a result, the violent sectarian rhetoric in Bahrain’s Salafist community remains generally unchallenged by political leaders or security authorities: “Now the government is cracking down [on terrorism],” explained Husain Abdulla of Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, “but this is only after they let the issue grow and grow. But substantively, the crackdown [against violent Sunni Salafists] has not happened.”

Following is further information on how ISIS mobilization at subnational levels in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain exhibited the patterns described above.

Saudi Arabia

This section will review the mobilization of fighters by subnational region in Saudi Arabia, examining why Saudi ISIS fighters were more youthful and inexperienced in jihad than the overall sample of ISIS fighters, and why they came from regions different from those of previous jihadi mobilizations. It argues that Saudi fighters were distinctly mobilized by the ISIS state-building message, being as they were not only drawn from different regions and demographics than al-Qaeda mobilizations, but also that they were from regions uniquely interested in the social ordering of Islamic states. It will focus on the regions of Saudi Arabia with the highest rates of foreign fighter recruitment, listed below.

The Nejd (Qassim, Riyadh, Hail)

The geographic focus of the ISIS mobilization shifted to the Nejd compared to prior mobilizations, which drew recruits most heavily from Saudi Arabia’s western coast. Figure 11A shows a geographic breakdown of previous mobilizations. This includes fighters recorded during the 1980s and 1990s by Thomas Hegghammer, Saudis from the Sinjar records collected during the Iraq war, and Saudis held at Guantanamo Bay. The combined mobilization in these three data sets indicates that, while the highest per capita regions for recruits were in the north, only 7 percent of the fighters came from there. Meanwhile, 43 percent came from Mecca and Medina. During the ISIS mobilization (Figure 11B), however, Mecca and Medina accounted for only 20 percent of the foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia. This map also shows that ISIS fighters were disproportionately from the country’s Nejd heartland. Unlike fighters from hotspots of recruitment in North Africa, the socio-economic profile of Nejd fighters is quite similar to that of Saudi fighters overall. Figure 11C reflects the shift in fighters’ geographic origins, showing the difference...
Table 9: Top Provinces of Origin for ISIS Foreign Fighters in Saudi Arabia (Per Capita)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Riyadh (Nejd Region)</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>4,579,570</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Qassim (Nejd Region)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>991,032</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mecca</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>4,440,571</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Eastern Region</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3,087,687</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Hail (Nejd Region)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>529,012</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Tabouk</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>710,699</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Top Provinces of Origin for ISIS Foreign Fighters in Saudi Arabia (By % of Total Number of Saudi Fighters)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of Fighters from the Province</th>
<th>Percent of Total Saudi Fighters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Riyadh (Nejd Region)</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Qassim (Nejd Region)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mecca</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Eastern Region</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All Other Provinces &amp; Unknown</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>&lt;5% each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 11: Historical Development of Terrorist Recruitment in Saudi Arabia

Figure 11A: Historical (1980s–2000s) Jihad Recruitment by Province (Fighters per 100,000 Sunni Residents)

Figure 11B: ISIS Recruitment by Province (Fighters per 100,000 Sunni Residents)

Figure 11C: Difference: ISIS Recruitment vs. Historical Jihad Recruitment (Fighters per 100,000 Sunni Residents)

Figure 11D: Key Saudi Provinces, with Nejd region shaded
in the per capita rate of Saudi foreign fighters recruited by ISIS as compared to the historical rates. The only four regions of Saudi Arabia where there were fewer fighters joining ISIS as compared to historical jihadi conflicts were Medina, Mecca, the Northern Borders region and Jouf.

It is likely that Nejdis mobilized to fight with ISIS in greater numbers than they had in prior mobilizations, and at a higher rate than any other region in Saudi Arabia, because they were attracted to ISIS’ message of state-building. “Nejdis are generally not politically active—in fact, they are quite isolated,” explained Thomas Hegghammer, author of a book on jihadi mobilizations in Saudi Arabia. However, the Nejd, in particular the province of Qassim, is the “heartland of Saudi Wahhabism,” according to Hegghammer. The idea of a confrontation with Western imperialism, proposed by al-Qaeda, would be much more attractive to someone from the cosmopolitan cities of Mecca or Jeddah, or cities in the Eastern Province. The people of the Nejd, by contrast, would not be nearly as animated by these notions of geopolitical contest: “They were always less interested in international politics and more interested in how to organize an Islamic society,” Hegghammer said.

ISIS’s message was compelling for the socially conservative and relatively insulated Nejdis because it was a project that their forefathers had contributed to: the construction of an Islamic state. A hundred years ago, T.E. Lawrence compared the “tolerant, rather comfortable Islam of Mecca and Damascus” with “the fanaticism of Nejd” when describing his encounter with the founder of the Saudi state, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud. Ibn Saud’s mission relied on support from religious communities in the Nejd to construct an Islamic state of his own, the interesting parallels of which are depicted in greater detail by Cole Bunzel. In contrast, al-Qaeda’s project had, before 2011, more worldliness in its mission and a cosmopolitan origin in Saudi Arabia’s western cities. Although al-Qaeda made vague references to an Islamic state, its more immediate focus was the more abstract, political notion of confronting a “near enemy” and a “far enemy.” “A fighter for al-Qaeda is a fighter because he is radical,” explained Farea Al-Muslimi, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center. Hegghammer concurs. “Both [al-Qaeda and ISIS] have attracted large followings [in Saudi Arabia], but for different reasons,” he said. “Much of the support to al-Qaeda was pan-Islamist and anti-imperialist, whereas my sense is that what Saudi ISIS sympathizers like about ISIS is not so much their political platform as their theology and state-building project.” Although al-Qaeda’s rhetoric has shifted more toward state-building in recent years, the group was not advertising it as clearly or effectively as ISIS was in the period in question, 2013-14.

While the distinct appeal of ISIS’ propaganda of building an Islamic State likely explains the shift in Saudi foreign fighter recruitment to the Nejd, there are two other explanations worth considering.

First, it is possible that Nejdis became politically active during the Arab Spring, and ISIS recruited from this already mobilized population. A protest movement called “Fukou al-Ani” (“Release the Detainees”), organized in the Nejd, took advantage of the climate of protest during the Arab Spring to demand that the Saudi government release prisoners rounded up in the mid-2000s for connections to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The demonstrators said the prisoners should either be released or be given a fair trial. In 2008 the Saudi government, using a specialized criminal court in Riyadh, had begun trying thousands of detainees linked to al-Qaeda attacks in the kingdom in the mid-2000s. But Abdullah Khaled al-Saud, a visiting fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence in London and an assistant professor at the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh, argues in a forthcoming paper that, by 2011, many high-profile detainees had not yet been tried. “The Saudi government took a decision not to put all these detainees on trial,” he explained, “the reasoning they had, if they were put on trial for the crime of terrorism, they would
be sentenced to death. They hoped to put them through the counseling program to moderate them instead.”\textsuperscript{211} One study noted that in July 2007, the Saudi Interior Ministry reported that of the 9,000 security suspects who had been detained between 2003 and 2007, 3,106 of them were still being held.\textsuperscript{212} However, al-Saud notes, there is now an expeditious legal process for those detained on terrorism charges: they are “being put on trial in a swift manner” according to al-Saud.\textsuperscript{213}

The lack of trials for these prisoners helped to spark the Fukou al-Ani campaign. Although it was not based solely in the Nejd, many of the protest movement’s most important organizers were from there, particularly Qassim, the Saudi region with the most ISIS fighters per 100,000 residents. Demonstrations in Burayda, capital of the Qassim region, were some of the most visible in the campaign, according to al-Saud, who argued that the demonstrators “tried to create an atmosphere of confusion in the public by claiming that they were not detained for terrorism but for their political positions.”\textsuperscript{214} These protests, combined with the social media savvy of the demonstrators, made their demands compelling.

Al-Saud’s research suggests that many of the individuals in leadership positions in this protest movement later joined al-Qaeda or ISIS.\textsuperscript{215} At least three women from Qassim, who were the public faces of the campaign, either ended up joining ISIS or al-Qaeda in Yemen, or were arrested trying to do so.\textsuperscript{216} They include Reem al-Juraysh, who went with her son first to Yemen and then Syria to join ISIS.\textsuperscript{217} In addition, one of the people who promoted the Fukou al-Ani campaign through the Twitter account @almonaseron blew himself up, along with another ISIS member, in a raid on their hideout in Jeddah in late January, 2017.\textsuperscript{218} Al-Saud said it is suspected that the person in charge of the social media account promoting the Fukou al-Ani campaign also joined ISIS in Syria; the account was extremely active until the suspected individual was killed in 2015.\textsuperscript{219} There were also six men who were involved in the campaign, joined ISIS, and perpetrated and plotted attacks in the Arabian Peninsula:\textsuperscript{220}

1. Saleh Abdulrahman al-Qashami (suicide bombing of a Shi’a mosque in Qatif, Saudi Arabia, May 2015).\textsuperscript{221}

2. Fahd Suleiman al-Qabaa (suicide bombing of a Shi’a mosque in Kuwait, June 2015).\textsuperscript{222}

3. Yusuf Sulaiman al-Sulaiman (suicide bombing of Saudi security forces’ mosque in Asir, Saudi Arabia, August 2015).\textsuperscript{223}

4. Abdulrahman al-Tuwaijri (suicide bombing of a Shi’a mosque in al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, January 2016).\textsuperscript{224}

5. Abdulrahman Salih al-Omar (failed suicide bombing of a mosque and nearby market in Qatif, Saudi Arabia, July 2016).\textsuperscript{225}

6. Adel al-Mijmaj (one of four killed in a government raid of an ISIS cell in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, May 2015).\textsuperscript{226}

The Fukou al-Ani campaign mobilized a community of people in support of prisoners charged with terrorism in Saudi Arabia. It connected them to one another and, crucially, taught them critical lessons of organization and protest. “There was a network of radicals that were mobilized on this issue,” al-
Table 11: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores in the Nejd

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores [Standard Dev.]</th>
<th>Saudi Arabia (N=750)</th>
<th>Nejd (N=418)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>1.7 [1.5]</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.6 [1.2]</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.6 [0.9]</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.9 [1.2]</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.4 [1.1]</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Birth Year</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: A Social Network Theory for Why More ISIS Fighters Came From Central Saudi Arabia [the Nejd] Than Elsewhere in the Kingdom

![Graph showing the total number of fighters over time, with waves and recruitment effects labeled.]

- Wave I - Early joiners from the Nejd
- Wave II - Friends and family of early joiners join ISIS
- Wave III - Friends and family of friends and family of early joiners join ISIS
- Second wave “reach back” effect
- Early joiners “reach back” to recruit friends and family

**Graph Key:**
- Red: ISIS Fighters from the Nejd
- Brown: ISIS Fighters from the Rest of Saudi Arabia
Saud explained, “and it could have been tapped into for ISIS recruitment.”\\footnote{227}

While compelling, this explanation for why Qassim was a hub for ISIS recruitment is incomplete because it is not clear why this network would have supported ISIS as opposed to al-Qaeda. While some individuals noted above did try to join ISIS or carried out attacks on their behalf, the demonstrators for Fukou al-Ani were supporting those arrested for their suspected links to al-Qaeda.

A second argument for why more foreign fighters joined ISIS from the Nejd is that some of the earliest joiners were from this region. These first recruits reached back and recruited their friends and family at home, who, after joining, then recruited their friends and family. This “bridgehead effect” could have resulted in an accumulation of Nejdis in the 2013-14 registration forms we examined (see Figure 12).\footnote{228} This is possible because personal relationships have always been essential for terrorist recruitment: Many chronicles of the formation of al-Qaeda focus on how the first waves of Saudis to Afghanistan were recruited by Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden, who met in the western Saudi city of Jeddah.\footnote{229} This might explain why the Nejdi is disproportionately represented among Saudi foreign fighters joining ISIS, since an analysis of the dates that Saudi fighters joined ISIS shows an early rise in recruits specifically from the region.

While compelling, this argument of the social network of recruitment explains only that Nejdis were disproportionately represented among Saudi foreign fighters joining ISIS over the longer period of ISIS recruitment. It cannot answer why Nejdis would be overrepresented among these fighters at the beginning. But we should be wary of any explanation, since “the greatest difficulty for our ability to understand and respond to terrorism and radicalization is linear thinking,” warns Nafees Hamid, a researcher of radicalism for Artis International. “Multiple factors interact in complex ways that cause radicalization to emerge in individual people and groups.”\footnote{230} Therefore, the explanation for why the Nejdis mobilized for ISIS in greater numbers than for any previous jihadi conflict is likely a combination of multiple factors considered here.

**Mecca**

While the Nejdi role surged in the ISIS mobilization, that of Mecca, the province where many of the first al-Qaeda supporters were recruited, waned. Although fighters from Mecca represent 17 percent of the Saudi ISIS recruits in the sample, Meccans made up almost twice that proportion among Saudi fighters (33 percent) in historical mobilizations. Mecca had the most fighters in historical mobilizations claim it as their region of origin in Saudi Arabia.\footnote{231} Combined over this historical period, Mecca had a rate of 5.6 fighters per 100,000 residents. Most fighters from the province of Mecca in the ISIS mobilization come from the two largest cities, Mecca and Jeddah.

Al-Qaeda’s prior mobilizations in Mecca relied on the networks developed by the group’s leaders. Mecca province was where the relationship began between Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, a key early theologian supporting al-Qaeda: Both were at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah—the former a student, the latter a teacher. These Jeddah connections were crucial in the early years of their recruiting of Saudis to join the jihad in Afghanistan. As Hegghammer describes in *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, “The role of friendship and kinship in these processes of joining helps to shed light on the geographical pattern of mobilization to the early jihad fronts. Practically all Saudis who went to Afghanistan prior to 1986 were from the Mecca-Medina-Jidda [Jeddah] triangle. That many Saudis joined early jihadist movements from Mecca and western Saudi Arabia reflects the fact that recruitment began with entrepreneurs from this area and subsequently followed their social networks.”\footnote{232}

These networks of mobilization for al-Qaeda in Mecca and Medina are important because fighters who joined the group must pledge their loyalty to
Table 12: Average Fighter Socioeconomic Scores in Mecca

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>1.7 [1.5]</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.6 [1.2]</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.6 [0.9]</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.9 [1.2]</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.4 [1.1]</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Birth Year</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

its leaders. This pledge, called a bay’ah, is an oath of allegiance that was practiced during the time of the Prophet Mohammed and is considered sacred and binding in jihadist groups. If fighters from western Saudi Arabia had pledged bay’ah to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the successor to Osama bin Laden after his death in 2011, then it would be hard for them to change allegiances (though not impossible). The notion that bay’ah is “sticky”—i.e., it is difficult for fighters to switch allegiances between groups—might have played a role in the fact that few known terrorist groups anywhere in the world switched allegiances from al-Qaeda to ISIS when the latter declared the caliphate in 2014. Such a phenomenon, which was observed to have occurred at a group level, is likely also part of the reason why the rate of ISIS joiners from western Saudi Arabia declined as compared to those mobilized for al-Qaeda.

The socioeconomic backgrounds of fighters from Mecca add evidence to the theory that participation in jihadist conflicts is a phenomenon with more history in Mecca than in central Saudi Arabia: Meccans who joined ISIS were older, more likely to be married, and more likely to report greater religious knowledge (see Table 12). While there is no comparable data set on Saudi fighters who joined al-Qaeda-linked groups in the region in 2013-14, it is possible that Meccans were more likely to join al-Qaeda than people from other parts of Saudi Arabia. This hypothesis should be further tested with empirical research. Nevertheless, there were fewer recruits joining ISIS from Mecca in per capita and percentage terms as compared to mobilizations for al-Qaeda.
Bahrain

This section will review the mobilization of fighters by subnational region in Bahrain. Bahrain’s fighter mobilization was so geographically concentrated in one province (Muharraq), where 19 of 27 ISIS fighters from Bahrain claimed residence, that subnational analysis of fighter origins is possible for this region.234

Bahraini mobilization for jihadist causes is new, composed of fighters who are overwhelmingly youthful and unmarried, and poses a long-term state security threat because of the elite-level connections of its recruits and supporters. This section argues that Bahraini fighters were mobilized by the sanctioning of violent sectarian rhetoric and open recruitment of fighters and financiers of militias for the Syrian conflict. It will argue two key points: that Bahraini political conditions prevented the country’s leadership from prosecuting those recruiting for ISIS, and that Bahrainis were new to joining jihadist conflicts.

The rhetorical support from prominent Bahrainis for violent sectarianism and for armed groups to mobilize for fighting in Syria resulted in Bahrainis taking part in the ISIS mobilization at a greater rate than for previous jihadi conflicts. Among members of Bahraini society to join was Turki al-Binali, who became a leading ISIS theologian and head of ISIS’ hisba religious police before being killed in an airstrike in May 2017. As Binali was from a prominent family, he used his relatives’ connections, particularly in the security sector, to recruit fighters: “All the Bahrainis who joined IS were recruited by Turki,” a friend of the Binali family said.235 Turki al-Binali was referenced by 17 of the 27 ISIS fighters from Bahrain, the largest number of references for one person in the entire Arabian Peninsula. Mohammed al-Binali, Turki’s cousin, was featured in ISIS’ most famous Bahraini recruitment video, in which he is one of four Bahrainis who renounced their citizenship on camera and tore up their passports. Mohammed had been a lieutenant in the Bahraini Defence Forces and worked for two years in the country’s notorious al-Jaw prison before departing for Syria.236

Whereas in North Africa, protests created space for jihadist mobilization based primarily in marginalized communities, in Bahrain, jihadists built their recruitment campaign on the counterrevolutionary crackdown against the Shi’a who demonstrated against the government during

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores [Standard Dev.]</th>
<th>Arabian Peninsula (N=844)</th>
<th>Bahrain (N=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>1.8 (1.5)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Job</td>
<td>2.6 (1.2)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.5 (0.9)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Knowledge</td>
<td>1.9 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries Visited</td>
<td>2.5 (1.2)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Birth Year</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Jihad Experience</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the 2011 uprisings. The Bahraini Sunni community was mobilized after these demonstrations with violent rhetoric that described protesters as a Shi’a fifth column supported by Iran.237 The mobilization of Bahrainis to ISIS thereafter “was a response to the events in 2011, and the way that they were portrayed and the level of animosity that they inspired in terms of the response,” explained Kristian Ulrichsen, a Persian Gulf expert at the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.238 One Bahraini human rights researcher based in the United Kingdom described the involvement of Bahrainis in ISIS as “part and parcel of the ratcheting up of the rhetoric of sectarianism in Bahrain.”239

This violent rhetoric turned on the primarily Shi’a Syrian government’s brutal crackdown on oppositionists during the outbreak of the conflict there. Bahraini members of parliament (MPs) and senior religious figures visited militant groups in Syria as part of the widespread public support for groups involved in the conflict during the period of ISIS recruitment captured in the data (2013-14). Support for extremists “was so normal that you had MPs visiting the areas of Jabhat al-Nusra [an al-Qaeda-linked group now calling itself Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham] in Syria and putting bombs in rocket launchers and firing them,” Abdulla said. Bahraini ISIS supporters, he explained, “start by asking people how to support ‘the brothers in Syria.’ If you are wealthy, this is hidden code to help donate funds to support a group. If you are a young and poor person, this encouragement is to join.”240 Yet fighters joined from all sides of Bahrain’s Sunni society: One fighter from Muharraq was single, 15 years old, had an elementary school education and no job, while others held important government posts and were from prominent families.

The rise of the Khawalids in Bahrain’s ruling family demonstrates the political power of the voices supporting violent sectarianism. The Khawalids are a powerful clique within the Bahraini royal family, mainly two brothers, Khalifa and Khalid. They are conservative and hardline with a power base among Bahraini’s Islamist movements.241 Justin Gengler, a professor at Qatar University, describes the rise of the Khawalids as being based primarily on strong personal relationships with the current ruler, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.242

Using their influence, the Khawalids led Bahrain’s violent crackdown on demonstrators during the 2011 Arab Spring protests. A 2013 Wall Street Journal article noted that while the king had initially tried to compromise with the protesters, the Khawalids maintained a hard-line stance and, eventually, their line of argument prevailed.243 As a result, they maintain a position of extreme power and influence over government decision-making: “Much of the kingdom’s political power resides in a conservative triumvirate” that includes the two Khawalid brothers, according to Frederic Wehrey, a senior fellow with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Middle East program.244 The rise and political power of the Khawalids demonstrate how extensive the support for violent sectarian mobilizations existed in Bahraini society.

Due to Bahrain’s small size and the small absolute number of fighters from the country in the ISIS sample, Bahraini jihadism is unlikely to be a significant threat to the region or the broader international community. However, the ISIS mobilization of Bahrainis, along with the larger militarization of Bahraini society, is poised to be an enduring threat to local stability. This means that, although “Bahraini security services are very focused on Bahraini supporters [of extremists],” according to Plotkin Boghardt,245 key figures in the government espouse violent rhetoric and rely on Islamist hard-liners for their very survival. The government is “hesitant to crack down on them because they are afraid of the blowback,” Abdulla explained, but “they still rely on these elements to keep their legitimacy.”246 While it will be easy for the Bahraini government to strip the citizenship of people who are known to have left the country to join ISIS, those fighters are the “tip of the iceberg” problem: The social realities of violent radicalism in Bahrain are far more profound. For decades to come, Bahrain will struggle to confront the forces of organized religious violence it helped unleash.
Various anti-ISIS coalitions have retaken the vast majority of ISIS-controlled territory in a concerted military effort over the past three years. Yet the threat from jihadist terrorism has not abated, due to endemic conflict and the inability of countries in the region and their international partners to address the root causes that gave rise to ISIS in the first place.

The rise of ISIS as a global force from 2013 through 2014 warns of the dangers of presuming that military setbacks to any particular terrorist organization will eliminate the larger jihadist threat. ISIS’ rise followed a devastating series of setbacks for al-Qaeda, including the death of Osama bin Laden, by only a couple of years. The data on ISIS foreign fighter recruits in 2013-14 presented in this report suggest that the underlying economic, social and political factors that motivated thousands of men and women from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to join ISIS, even as al-Qaeda suffered defeats, are largely unresolved despite the military advances against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. If left unattended, these factors—economic inequality and political exclusion in North Africa, a continued propensity among certain elites in the Arabian Peninsula to support violent religious radicalism—will likely manifest in future foreign fighter mobilizations to new or ongoing conflicts.

This paper contributes to ongoing efforts to understand how terrorist groups fill their ranks. While decades of terrorism research has failed to achieve consensus on what makes a terrorist, our findings in this paper suggest that we may be asking the wrong question. Rather than trying to figure out “what theory of terrorism is most accurate” (i.e., economic hardship, youth bulges), we should instead ask “where is a theory of terrorism most applicable?” This shifts our focus from grand theories to an emphasis on diagnosing the local conditions in places that disproportionately support violent religious extremism.

In the regions of North Africa with high rates of ISIS foreign fighters, rampant underemployment, lack of representation among political and economic elites, and poor service provision exacerbated long-standing grievances. In the wake of the Arab Spring protests, political movements promoting violent religious extremism manipulated these grievances to mobilize large networks of supporters.

In the Arabian Peninsula, ISIS appealed to new populations that had not been mobilized for jihad before. In Saudi Arabia, it appealed to those who were interested in how to order an Islamic society. In Bahrain, several charismatic individuals recruited from a population mobilized
by the violent sectarianism that suppressed anti-government protests in 2011. In Yemen, far fewer recruits were mobilized to support ISIS than could be expected, an indication that al-Qaeda remains powerful in this particular country. While ISIS’ recruitment was helped by protests in the Arabian Peninsula, unlike in North Africa, these protests had narrower aims: They either supported ruling regimes, such as in Bahrain, or advocated the release of detainees suspected of terrorism, as in Saudi Arabia.

Given the continued relevance of the root causes that drove tens of thousands to join ISIS from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, our research in this report presents three recommendations for how policymakers and analysts can address this problem in the future:

1. **Debate where theories better explain radicalization, not which theories best explain radicalization.** Many debates regarding radicalization and terrorist group recruitment compare which theory best explains radicalization (e.g., unemployment, poor education, lack of social integration). But policy and academic research on these topics would benefit instead from researching each country and region independently to better understand where one theory of radicalization might better explain local conditions than another. After examining the subnational origins of over 1,800 ISIS foreign fighters from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, we discovered that fighters in these two regions came from local contexts that were profoundly different, suggesting dissimilar motivations and recruitment pathways.

Community-level analysis is vital to understanding what conditions make ISIS’ ideology appear reasonable. In many of the regions we analyzed in this study, the fighters who joined ISIS were not outliers; they had socioeconomic backgrounds that were more or less representative of their hometowns. While individual terrorists might appear from our perspective as “radical,” those from regions with high rates of ISIS fighters—like Ettadhamen (Tunisia), Derna (Libya), Muharraq (Bahrain) or Qassim (Saudi Arabia)—were unlikely to be seen locally as outliers. Communities where ISIS’ ideology appears reasonable provide a profound enabling environment for terrorist recruitment. It is important to identify these regions, not only to understand how a group like ISIS can attract recruits, but also because it is easier to defeat terrorist groups by changing the dynamic in the communities from which they recruit than to interdict each recruit individually. Targeting individual terrorists without properly diagnosing the community-level effects in facilitating or undermining their activities risks failing to see the forest for the trees. The vast multiplicity of factors inherent to any question of human motivation tends to overwhelm the ability of analysts to produce useful insights.

Yet overgeneralizing the motivations of all terrorists in the Muslim world risks failing to appreciate the local nuances supporting the ISIS mobilization. ISIS’ particular religious ideology is important to its recruitment in North Africa. But policies aimed at promoting moderate or non-jihadist religious and political voices in the region are unlikely to stem a radicalization challenge that predated ISIS and draws upon the region’s economic and social underclasses. The key question is why these underclasses saw ISIS as a reasonable expression of their religious and political views to begin with.

Meanwhile, economic reform efforts underway in Saudi Arabia, while important for the kingdom’s long-term economic viability, are unlikely to address its problem of radicalization, which draws

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**Rather than trying to figure out ‘what theory of terrorism is most accurate,’ we should instead ask ‘where is a theory of terrorism most applicable?’**
Navigating between the twin traps of terrorism analysis—getting lost in the multiplicity of individual motivations or embracing theories that are too general to be meaningful—requires deep community-level analysis.

Substantial support from parts of the region’s elite. Viewing ISIS in the Arabian Peninsula with a North African lens would be misleading. There, supporting moderate imams promoting messages of peace—and condemning those preaching violence and sectarianism—could have more traction. Trying to find a broad class reaction to economic marginalization in the Arabian Peninsula would miss the influence of those with wealth and political power.

Navigating between these twin traps of terrorism analysis—getting lost in the multiplicity of individual motivations or embracing theories that are too general to be meaningful—requires deep community-level analysis. Shifting the key question to where theories best apply and how they apply in specific contexts provides a potential path for future analysis.

2. Support political and economic inclusion in North Africa as an issue of regional security. ISIS recruitment in North Africa drew upon the failure of governments in the region to address rampant underemployment, lack of representation among political and economic elites, and poor service provision. Anger at poor governance in North Africa is not new, but during the Arab Spring, it overturned institutions that limited terrorist recruitment networks. This combination of economic malaise and the collapse of state institutions drove thousands to join terrorist networks primarily in areas with a history of protest and militancy.

Preventing the rise of another major jihadist mobilization in North Africa will require greater investment in marginalized areas as well as efforts to reduce political marginalization within the region through support for democratic and inclusive politics. To some extent this is already occurring: Many bilateral and multilateral aid programs in Tunisia focus on rural economic development. In Morocco, King Mohammed VI supports a high-profile reinvestment of state resources in rural regions, such as the National Initiative for Human Development. He also spearheaded a political effort at decentralization, giving more power to rural provinces. Morocco and Tunisia also rank in the top five countries in the Arab world in the 2017 World Bank’s Doing Business index, a sign that they are aware that encouraging new investment from abroad is a prerequisite to growing their economies. Libya’s economic prospects, however, are much dimmer. The country has at least two governments, is burning through cash and is one of the hardest places to do business in the region. Libya’s security vacuum is the most significant enabler of terrorist activity, therefore a political resolution that ends the deadlock and restores basic state security infrastructure is an urgent necessity. Addressing these issues will require a well-funded and supported State Department alongside other elements of American power.

Beyond these first steps, greater international support for regional trade can unlock vast economic opportunity for North Africa, which has among the lowest rates of regional trade in the world. However, as the United States promotes greater trade, it must avoid creating further patterns of inequality by centralizing political power in the hands of a small elite.
3. Address the ideological roots of Salafi-Jihadism as a security priority in the Arabian Peninsula. ISIS recruitment in the Arabian Peninsula drew upon new populations that were more likely to be motivated by the group’s program of Islamic state-building than were fighters from elsewhere. In addition, ISIS’ recruitment drew upon connections and support from among the region’s political and economic elite.

Countries in the Arabian Peninsula are effective at prosecuting terrorists when their national security is threatened, such as after high-profile AQAP attacks in the mid-2000s and ISIS-affiliated attacks in 2015. The real problem in the Arabian Peninsula is in dealing with new generations of individuals radicalized to violence. This is the lesson of the 2013-14 ISIS mobilization: Because many of the ISIS recruits were new, and because they were leaving Saudi Arabia to fight elsewhere, they were not tracked by law enforcement until they were gone.

To address this challenge, the United States should continue to pressure these governments to prevent those who support violent extremism from attaining positions of social or political influence. There are precedents for success: For example, Nayef al-Ajmi, a Kuwaiti cabinet minister, was sacked for his support of jihadist groups after pressure by the U.S. Treasury. Such pressure must extend to other contexts, such as in Bahrain, where the influence of hard-liners like the Khawalids must be reduced to prevent continued recruitment by extremists. In Saudi Arabia, ongoing efforts to address violent extremism should be supported. But wide-ranging campaigns to arrest religious figures should include sufficient evidence and expedient prosecution, or else they could generate backlash. The Fokou al-Ani campaign in 2011, which called for the release of detainees who awaited trial on terrorism charges for years, developed strong ties to ISIS.

People in the region should also aim to limit the opportunity for those who preach violence to reach a wide audience. One model for success is the recent widespread condemnation of hard-liners who had denounced a recently deceased Kuwaiti actor, Abdulhussain Abdelredha. The outpouring occurred after several clerics reviled the actor as an “Iranian Shi’a.” This incident showed that a wide swath of society in the region disapproves of violent sectarianism, and future incidents like this should be studied for insights into a systematic campaign to undermine those who spread such rhetoric.
Appendix I. The ISIS Registration Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIELD</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Name and title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Religious affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Blood group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Place of birth and date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Occupation and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Member of the community (yes/no)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Qualification and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Education level (primary, secondary, university)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Previous criminal records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**الإدارة العامة للحدود**

**الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام**
Appendix II. The ISIS Registration Form – Translated

Each form contained the following fields:

1. Full name
2. Kunya [Nickname / Nom de guerre]
3. Mother’s name
4. Blood type
5. Date of birth and citizenship
6. Marital status: [check boxes for] Single, Married, Number of children
7. Address and place of residence
8. Education level
10. Occupation prior to your arrival
11. Countries visited and time spent in each
12. Point of entry and facilitator
13. Do you have a recommendation, and from whom?
14. Date of entry
15. Have you engaged in jihad before, and where?
16. [Do you want to be a] fighter, istishhadi [suicide bomber], or inghimasi [suicide fighter]?
17. Specialty: [check boxes for] Fighter, Sharia [official], Security [personnel], Administrative
18. Current work location
19. Personal belongings that you deposited
20. Level of understanding [of orders] and obedience
21. Address where [point of contact] can be reached
22. Date and location of death
23. Notes
Appendix III. The ISIS Fighters From North Africa

North Africa Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Residence</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Libyan Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Libyan Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derna</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>163,351</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benghazi</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>670,791</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirte</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>193,720</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripoli</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,065,405</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misrata</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>550,938</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Wahat</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>177,047</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zawiya</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>290,993</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butnan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>159,536</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marj</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>185,848</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Libyan Provinces</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,346,270</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Unlisted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tunisian Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Tunisian Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kebili</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>156,961</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunis</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>1,056,247</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bizerte</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>568,219</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidi Bouzid</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>429,912</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>576,088</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tataouine</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>149,453</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monastir</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>548,828</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medenine</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>479,520</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soussse</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>674,971</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasserine</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>439,243</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kairouan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>570,559</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manouba</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>379,518</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabès</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>374,300</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabeul</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>787,920</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gafsa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>337,331</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Arous</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>631,842</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahdia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>410,812</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sliiana</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>223,087</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sfax</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>955,421</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Béja</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>303,032</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jendouba</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>401,477</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kef</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>243,156</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaghroun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>176,945</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tozeur</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>107,912</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Unlisted</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Moroccan Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Moroccan Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceima</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3,556,729</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fès-Meknès</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4,236,892</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Béni Mellal-Khénifra</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2,520,776</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrakech-Safi</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4,520,569</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casablanca-Settat</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6,861,739</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabat-Salé-Kénitra</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4,580,866</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L'oriental</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,314,346</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souss-Massa</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2,676,847</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laâyoune-Sakia al Hamra</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>367,758</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Moroccan Provinces</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,211,720</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Unlisted</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Algerian Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Algerian Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algiers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2,988,145</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oran</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,454,078</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boumerdès</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>802,083</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Béchar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>270,061</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiemcen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>949,135</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sétif</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,489,979</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>938,475</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mascara</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>784,073</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ain Defla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>766,013</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghardaia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>363,598</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Unlisted</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Algerian Provinces</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23,274,390</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix IV. The ISIS Fighters From the Arabian Peninsula

#### Arabian Peninsula Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Residence</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Saudi Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population(^{254})</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Saudi Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qassim</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>991,032</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riyadh</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>4,579,570</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabouk</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>710,699</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medina</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1,353,102</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>4,440,571</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Borders</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>285,486</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jouf</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>373,662</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hail</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>529,012</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahah</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>376,204</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jizan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,187,284</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asir</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,719,950</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najran</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>430,711</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Region</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3,087,687</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Yemeni Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Yemeni Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amran</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,230,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Bayda</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>809,000</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudaydah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3,023,000</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Jawf</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>622,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Mahwit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>693,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanat Al Asimah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,449,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhamar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,864,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajjah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,073,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibb</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,987,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marib</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>334,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>553,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa'dah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>974,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana'a</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,288,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiz</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,354,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>826,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abyan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>608,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhale</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>659,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Mahrah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>124,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadramawt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,441,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahij</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,013,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabwa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>659,000</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Qatari Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Qatari Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madinat ash Shamal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Khor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24,244</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umm Salal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,900</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Daayen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6,521</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayyan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72,685</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>114,775</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Wakrah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35,884</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Omani Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Omani Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al Batinah North</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>475,208</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Provinces</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,410,875</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Emirati Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Emirati Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharjah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>138,272</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubai</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>137,573</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu Dhabi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>350,277</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ras al-Khaimah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87,848</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajman</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39,231</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umm al-Quwain</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15,873</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujairah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56,421</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Kuwaiti Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Kuwaiti Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait City</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>255,540</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawalli</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>230,759</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farwaniya</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>236,433</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mubarak al-Kabir</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>156,451</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmadi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>286,707</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jahra</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>185,819</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Bahraini Fighters by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of ISIS Fighters From the Province</th>
<th>Province Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Local Sunni Muslims</th>
<th>Fighters Per 100,000 Local Sunni Residents</th>
<th>% of Bahraini Fighter Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>166,465</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Governorate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>123,787</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Governorate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>222,608</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muharraq</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>117,884</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Not Recorded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While we chose to use the acronym the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), there are many other acronyms used to describe the group: the Islamic State (IS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Daesh (an acronym of the group’s Arabic name).

We use the term Salafi-Jihadism to refer to groups and individuals that seek to bring about, through violence, an emulation of the practices of the first three generations of Islam. The term is shortened to “jihadism” in this paper for readability purposes. This draws from Shiraz Maher, Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea (London: Hurst, 2016). When this paper uses other terms, it is to deliberately broaden the scope of analysis. For example, violent religious radicalism includes other non-state armed groups in the region that advance anti-normative agendas primarily through violence; Islamism refers to organizations that seek to transform states and societies according to Islamic law, either through violence or strictly political means; and Salafism can refer to groups of people who try to bring about the emulation of practices of the first three generations of Islam, whether through violence or not.


For the purposes of this paper, the region of North Africa comprises Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The Arabian Peninsula comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.


These figures will vary in this report when different numbers of fighters include or exclude information about their subnational origins (e.g., there were 844 fighters who claimed residence in a country in the Arabian Peninsula, but 811 whose origins can be pinpointed at a subnational level).

Nearly all of those who joined ISIS were Sunni Muslims at the time of their arrival in Syria or Iraq. Therefore, we index our populations by the proportion of resident local Sunni Muslims. While this is negligible for the North African countries analyzed here, there is a sizable population of Shi’a Muslims in many Arabian Peninsula countries. In addition, there are many foreign nationals living in the Arabian Peninsula. In those countries, per capita fighter rates were calculated using local national population statistics that were discounted by the proportion of Sunnis living in each province. While official statistics distinguish between local and foreign national populations, they do not differentiate between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims. Therefore, we estimate the percentage of sectarian populations where relevant. In North Africa, rates were discounted at the national level for the proportion of Sunnis with no distinction between provinces.

A senior official in the Obama administration was quoted as saying: “This [ISIS] is an international threat, and it’s all coming out of Syria and it’s coming through Turkish territory.” Adam Entous, Gordon Lubold and Dion Nissenbaum, “U.S. Urges Turkey to Seal Syria Border,” Wall Street Journal, November 28, 2015.

The five questions are translated as: 1. Marital status: [check boxes for] Single, Married, Number of children; 2. Education level; 3. Level of sharia expertise: [check
15 We recognize that “underemployment” is a term used in labor economics to describe workers who are highly skilled but working in low-skill/low-paying jobs. However, the term also accurately describes the phenomenon we found particularly among ISIS fighters from North Africa, who report employment in jobs that are part time, low wage and/or unreliable (e.g., “day laborer”).


17 Standard deviation shows the variance from the mean. Therefore, the higher the standard deviation noted in parenthesis in the table above, the more examples deviated widely from the average.

18 The files can be accessed here: https://wikileaks.org/gitmo

19 In this report, North Africa is used to mean the region comprising Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Algeria. This report excludes Egypt from its examination despite its geographic location in North Africa because a review of fighters from Egypt found that they shared much in common with fighters from the Levant. We judged that Egypt would be better analyzed alongside Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Lebanon, with which it also shares geographic and socio-political links, than with the North African/Maghreb countries examined here.


22 Interview with Haim Malka, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, June 28, 2016.


28 Clionadh Raleigh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen, “Introducing ACLED: An Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset,”


32 “Terrorist Group ISIS cannot recruit Algerian youth, says expert.”


35 North Africa is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. However, for consistency with the Arabian Peninsula, this report indexes the provincial population to the national percentage Muslim recorded in the CIA World Factbook entries for Libya ([https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html)), Tunisia ([https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html)), and Morocco ([https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html)). Algeria was similarly indexed using the CIA World Factbook, which lists its population as 99 percent Muslim and predominantly Sunni although it is not recorded in this table because none of Algeria’s provinces were among the top 20 provinces in terms of per capita recruitment. ([https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ag.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ag.html)).

36 Grand Tunis is a sprawling metropolitan area with neighborhoods that stretch across provincial boundaries and a reported origin of Tunis may refer to any province in Grand Tunis. As a result, this paper combines Grand Tunis’ component provinces of Tunis, Ariana, Ben Arous and Manouba for its analyses. All four provinces are among North Africa’s top 20 provinces in terms of per capita recruitment, and are presented here and in the paper’s maps for awareness.


38 Mohammed Masbah, “Moroccan Foreign Fighters.”

39 The provinces that make up the greater Tunis area known as Grand Tunis are grouped together as one data point in this analysis. All four provinces were among the top 20 per capita fighter-producing provinces in North Africa when examined separately. If the provinces are examined separately, there is still a negative correlation.

40 “How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb.”


45 Interview with Justin Richmond, executive director, Impl. Project, conducted by David Sterman, August 8, 2017.


47 Hebatalla Elgazzar et al., “Labor Market Dynamics in Libya.”


50 Ibid.


54 Ibid.


58 While not necessarily poor, students in Libya tend to face a poor employment situation after graduation. See for example: Adele M.E. Jones, “Youth Education and Guidance for Employment in Libya: An Evolving Scenario” in Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning Across the Mediterranean, ed. Ronald G. Sultana (The Netherlands, 2017); Hebatalla Elgazzar et al., “Labor Market Dynamics in Libya.”


60 Libyan economic data from the World Bank: https://data.worldbank.org/

61 Ibid.


63 Ibid.


67 Ethan Chorin, Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution.


69 “How Libya’s Fezzan Became Europe’s New Border.”


71 Rebecca Murray, “Southern Libya Destabilized: The Case of Ubari.”

72 Dirk Vandewalle, A History of Modern Libya.


74 Frederic Wehrey, “Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya.”

75 Ethan Chorin, Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution.


77 Ethan Chorin, Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution.


80 Ethan Chorin, Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution. p55.


82 Ethan Chorin, Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution. p55.

83 Brian Fishman et al., “Bombers, Bank Accounts & Bleedout: Al Qa’ida’s Road In and Out of Iraq.”

84 Ibid.


86 Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, “Libyan civil war: an opening for al Qaeda and Jihad?”; Interview with Barak Barfi.

87 This paper utilizes the division of Tunisia’s provinces into peripheral and central provinces put forward by Hamza Meddeb in “Peripheral Vision: How Europe Can Help Preserve Tunisia’s Fragile Democracy,” European Council on Foreign Relations, January 13, 2017. http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/peripheral_vision_how_europe_can_preserve_tunisias_democracy_7215

88 While this report analyzes the origins of fighters in other regions of Tunisia at a provincial level, for Grand Tunis it analyzes fighters only at the neighborhood level. Grand Tunis presents a particularly difficult challenge for mapping fighter origins, as its neighborhoods stretch across provincial boundaries. Also, a reference to residing in Tunisia may mean either the province Tunis or anywhere in the Grand Tunis area. As a result, we caution against drawing conclusions from province-to-province differences in mobilization in Grand Tunis.


91 Hamza Meddeb, “Peripheral Vision: How Europe Can Help Preserve Tunisia’s Fragile Democracy”


94 Ibid.


98 In addition to his inclusion in the files examined here, Ayashi’s employment with Ansar al-Sharia is also explicitly noted by West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center, though the details on his further connections are not described there. https://ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CTC_Caliphates-Global-Workforce-Report.pdf


106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.


110 Ibid.

111 It is of course possible that some of the recommenders referred to as Abu Zubayr were not Ali al-Harzi but other figures that used the pseudonym Abu Zubayr.


115 Ibid.


119 Interview with Barak Barfi.


122 “Preliminary findings by the United Nations Working Group on the use of mercenaries on its official visit to

123 “Tunisia: A Reform Agenda to Support Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth,” Secretary-General of the OECD, March 2015.  

http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/753151468312307987/pdf/892330WP0REVIS0Box3853778000PUBLIC0.pdf

https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/20604/928710PUB0Box3021027109781464802713.pdf?sequence=1

126 Ibid.

http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/10/15/tunisian-confidence-in-democracy-wanes/

128 “IRI Tunisia Index,” International Republican Institute, December 2012-January 2013.  
http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2013%20February%202014%20IRI%20Tunisia%20Index%2C%20February%202014.pdf


130 Ibid.


132 Ibid.


http://graphics.thomsonreuters.com/15/05/TUNISIA-ATTACK:GUNMEN.pdf


136 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”  


138 This calculation assumes that when fighters said they resided in Ettadhamen, they meant the delegation of Ettadhamen, which has a population of 84,312. It is possible that when fighters stated they lived in Ettadhamen, they were referring to the larger area of the combined Ettadhamen-Mnihla delegations (population 174,196). If that is the case, the larger region produced fighters at a rate of 13.3 fighters per 100,000 Muslims. On the other hand, it is possible that fighters were specifically referring to the area of Cité Ettadhamen (population: 12,446) and not the broader delegation, in which case it would have produced fighters at a rate of 186.7 per 100,000. Population numbers for the various subdivisions come from Tunisia’s 2014 census.  

139 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”  


143 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”

144 Ibid.

145 Moaz al-Himai‘i, “What is ISIS’ Aims in Southern
146 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”

147 12 fighters reported being from Ben Guerdane. Ben Guerdane has a population of 79,912, according to the 2014 census.

148 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”


151 Olfa Lamloum, “Marginalisation, insecurity and uncertainty on the Tunisian-Libyan border.”

152 Ahmed Nadhif, “Why these Tunisian border towns have become IS recruitment hotspots.”


154 Sudarsan Raghavan, “Islamic State, growing stronger in Libya, sets its sights on fragile neighbor Tunisia.”

155 Ahmed Nadhif, “Why these Tunisian border towns have become IS recruitment hotspots.”

156 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”


158 “General Census of the Population and the Household 2014 by Governorates.”


160 We indexed the number of protest/riot events listed by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project from 2011 through 2014 to the same 2014 provincial population numbers we used to generate this report’s per capita fighter production rates in order to generate results that could be compared easily despite the fact that provincial populations vary in size. This report uses Version 8 of ACLED’s Africa data available at https://www.acleddata.com/data/


162 Olfa Lamloum, “Politics on the Margins in Tunisia: Vulnerable young people in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen.”


164 Interview with William Lawrence, conducted by David Sterman, October 12, 2017.

165 Brian Fishman et al., “Bombers, Bank Accounts & Bleedout: Al Qa’ida’s Road In and Out of Iraq.”


168 Sudarsan Raghavan, “Islamic State, growing stronger in Libya, sets its sights on fragile neighbor Tunisia.”

169 Ibid.


172 Ibid.


174 Ibid.

175 This is based on a comparison between the Arabian Peninsula and four other regions in the Muslim world: North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt), the Levant (Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran), South-Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan). The Arabian Peninsula is slightly younger on average than Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia), but much older without including Yemen. Data compiled from the World Bank: [http://databank.worldbank.org/](http://databank.worldbank.org/)

176 We relied on official government statistics for sources on proportions of youth populations by province. All demographic data are cited in the appendix. The youth populations were indexed to local residents, and not differentiated by Sunni vs. Shia, because we assume there is a similar distribution of proportions of youthfulness between these communities in the Arabian Peninsula. While Saudi Arabia’s statistics office collects regional populations broken down by age brackets and nationality (i.e., Saudi national or foreign national), Bahrain’s statistics office does not collect such figures. However, Bahrain’s statistics office does collect information on 1) total populations of provinces by nationality, 2) provincial populations by age brackets (but not nationality), and 3) total populations of Bahrain by age brackets and nationality. In order to estimate the population of local nationals aged 15-24 in Muharraq, we took the total population of Muharraq aged 15-24 (inclusive of local nationals and foreigners) and weighted it by a proportion that included A) the proportion of locals to foreigners aged 15-24, and B) the proportion of locals and foreigners in Muharraq specifically. For more information on this calculation, please contact the authors. Finally, it should be noted that the result remains positive between the proportion of youth aged 15-24 in a province and the rate of ISIS foreign fighters even without the inclusion of Muharraq in the results.

177 Economic prosperity figures are drawn from per province monthly household spending. As these figures were only available at a subnational level in Saudi Arabia, we exclude Muharraq-Bahrain from the graph. All graphs show provinces with at least 10 foreign fighters. Historical rates of involvement in jihadi conflicts were derived by taking the weighted average of the rates of participation collected in the Sinjar Papers, in the leaked Guantanamo detainee files, and in the Hegghammer data

178 Interview with Thomas Hegghammer, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 24, 2017.


180 From “The Guantanamo Files”: [https://wikileaks.org/gitmo/](https://wikileaks.org/gitmo/)

181 Interview with Husain Abdulla, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 4, 2017


183 The ISIS foreign fighter files examined here almost exclusively include those who joined ISIS via Turkey.

184 Interview with Farea Al-Muslimi, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 27, 2017.

185 Interview with Steffen Hertog, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, September 18, 2017.


188 The Shuaybi School has been profiled in Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).


191 Ibid.

192 “Active” Salafis are more politically engaged and can translate into support for jihadi causes. In contrast, “quietist” Salafism is more directed at personal purification, including prayer and ritual. For more, see Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

193 “Kuwait captures ‘Abu Turab,’ who was responsible for Daesh’s oil and whose mother specialized in ‘psychological mobilization’” (Ar.), *Asharq al-Aswat*, July 5, 2016. [https://goo.gl/HzaVMB](https://goo.gl/HzaVMB)


195 Ibid.


197 Interview with Elizabeth Dickinson, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, September 14, 2017.


200 Ibid.

201 Interview with Lori Plotkin Boghardt, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 21, 2017


203 Interview with Husain Abdulla, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 4, 2017.

204 Hegghammer data comes from: Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Sinjar data comes from CTC West Point; Guantanamo data comes from [https://wikileaks.org/gitmo](https://wikileaks.org/gitmo)

205 Interview with Thomas Hegghammer, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 24, 2017.

206 Ibid.


209 Interview with Farea Al-Muslimi, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 27, 2017.

210 Interview with Thomas Hegghammer, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 24, 2017.

211 Interview with Abdullah Khaled al-Saud, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 25, 2017.

212 Gendron, 2010.

213 Interview with al-Saud.

214 Interview with al-Saud.


216 Interview with al-Saud.

217 “The Story of Reem al-Juraysh: From Fukou al-Ani Until She Joined Daesh,” (Ar.), *Al Arabiya*, February 9,

219 Interview with al-Saud.


222 Ibid.


227 Interview with al-Saud.


232 Hegghammer, Jihad in Saudi Arabia, p.68

233 This was observed by Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger in ISIS: The State of Terror (New York: Ecco Press, 2015).

234 In contrast, fighters from Yemen (26 registered fighters) and Kuwait (25 registered fighters) were too widely distributed across the countries’ provinces to allow for a subnational analysis.

235 This may have been an exaggeration for effect: 10 out of 27 Bahraini fighters did not list Turki al-Binali as their reference. Obaid Sahimi, “Turki al-Binali: The Daesh Leader and Theorist of Hate,” Asharq al-Awsat, February 4, 2015. https://goo.gl/ES8awx


238 Interview with Kristian Ulrichsen, August 12, 2017.

239 Interview with a Bahraini dissident based in London, August 9, 2017.

240 Interview with Abdullah.


245 Interview with Lori Plotkin Boghardt, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 21, 2017.

246 Interview with Husain Abdulla, conducted by Nate Rosenblatt, August 4, 2017.


249 Ibid.


251 Wadia Ait Hamza, “The Maghreb Union is one of the world’s worst-performing trading blocs. Here are five ways to change that,” World Economic Forum, June 1, 2017. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/five-ways-to-make-maghreb-work/


257 The population of Qatari nationals is not available at a subnational level. However, it is known that Qatari nationals comprise 12% of the population (source: CIA World Factbook – Qatar: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html). Therefore, for an estimate of the subnational populations of Qatar, we discounted provincial population statistics from the Qatar Ministry of Development, Planning and Statistics by 88% of the presumed foreign population in each province. Local population statistics from 2015: https://www.mdps.gov.qa/


261 Kuwait Public Authority for Civil Information – Statistical Reports.

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