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ALL JIHAD IS LOCAL

How Hubs of Foreign Fighter Recruitment Emerge:
A Case Study of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Mobilization

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University of Oxford
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ABSTRACT

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Nate Rosenblatt | Nuffield College | Doctor of Philosophy

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The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) recruited an estimated 40,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries from 2013 until approximately the end of 2015. This was one of the largest foreign fighter mobilizations to a single insurgent group fighting in a single civil war in the past 120 years. Based on the size and scale of this mobilization, it would seem as though ISIS foreign recruits came from every corner of the globe. Yet the vast majority of ISIS foreign fighters came from a small number of places around the world. This dissertation focuses on these places, which I call recruitment hubs, because they were sites of disproportionate recruitment. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), for example, 75 percent of ISIS foreign fighters were recruited from regions that constituted 11 percent of MENA's total population.

Why were ISIS foreign fighters concentrated in these hubs and not others? How did these recruitment hubs form and function? And why were people recruited to become foreign fighters, as opposed to joining an armed rebellion or participating in protests in their own country? This dissertation argues that ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs were crucial to the group's success attracting foreign fighters; not only because large numbers of fighters joined ISIS from hubs, but also because hubs affected the types of fighters who joined ISIS. This dissertation finds that there are some identifiable patterns in where hubs form, how they form, and why recruitment is so effective there. But it is much more difficult to predict whether recruitment hubs form for foreign fighting or other outcomes, like domestic insurgency. That is because the foreign fighting occurs in part due to highly contingent events – breaks in patterns of past relationships, the emergence of conflicts in foreign lands, and choices made by several individuals at critical junctures where potential alternatives existed.

“There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.
We are only undeceived
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.”

- T.S. Eliot, “East Coker”

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My research focuses on why hubs of recruitment for foreign fighters emerged for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Since the group first formed, many journalists, scholars, policymakers, and the public have questioned how ISIS emerged and why tens of thousands of fighters from over one hundred countries joined. I am lucky to have had the support and guidance of some of the world's most knowledgeable experts on the subject, many of whom had first-hand experience with ISIS. To the extent that this thesis contains something new or novel, it is chiefly thanks to their help. I hope they will find something of value in the pages that follow.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AST</i>	- Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia
<i>ISIS</i>	- Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<i>AQ</i>	- Al Qaeda
<i>MENA</i>	- Middle East and North Africa
<i>SES</i>	- Socioeconomic status
<i>UNSC</i>	- United Nations Security Council

GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS AND PHRASES¹

<i>Ansar al-Sharia</i>	- Followers of Sharia, a social movement designated a terrorist organisation by the Tunisian government in August 2013.
<i>awrāq al-‘amal</i>	- Work papers, usually denoting legal status to work abroad
<i>Umm al-Dunīa</i>	- “Mother of the World,” an Arabic nickname for Egypt
<i>ḥūma</i>	- “Hood” – a working-class neighbourhood (Tunisian slang)
<i>ḥūmanī</i>	- Someone from the ‘Ḥūma’ (Tunisian slang)
<i>da‘wa</i>	- “Call” or “Summons,” the preaching of Islam
<i>Salafi</i>	- Adherent of Salafism, a strict interpretation of Islam
<i>Salafi-Jihadi</i>	- Adherent of Salafi-Jihadism. See Maher (2016)
<i>sūq</i>	- Market
<i>shari‘a</i>	- Islamic law
<i>farḍ al-‘ayn</i>	- “Individual obligation” a theory of jihad popularized by Abdullah Azzam during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
<i>quṣa nufīr</i>	- “Call” Story used to motivate other ISIS foreign fighters
<i>kunīa</i>	- A “nom de guerre” that ISIS fighters were expected to have
<i>lijān as-sha‘biyya</i>	- Locals established “popular committees” to guard the neighbourhood (i.e., from looting)
<i>muhamashīn</i>	- “Disenfranchised” persons
<i>muezzin</i>	- A person who calls Muslims to prayer from the mosque
<i>mujtahidūn</i>	- Supporter of jihadis (variant of mujahidin – a jihadi fighter)
<i>warrāq</i>	- “To become papered” – a verb
<i>wālī</i>	- Head of governorate (a “governor”)

Administrative Names Specific to Tunisia (Map of Tunisia in Appendix M)

<i>Governorate</i>	- Largest subnational administrative district of Tunisia
<i>Delegation</i>	- Second-largest administrative district of Tunisia

¹ Transliterations follow the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). IJMES (2010) does not require strict transliteration (i.e., italicized with diacritical marks) for proper nouns or Arabic words found in the Marriam-Webster dictionary (i.e., Qur’an; shari’a; ulama).

CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

What are recruitment “hubs” and why do they matter?

“If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1974, p. 168.

1.1 Impetus for this Research

My research on foreign fighters grew from an earlier interest in political violence and conflict in the Levant. In 2008, I won a minor research grant from Johns Hopkins University to study Arabic and carry out research for my master’s thesis. I had many options: Egypt was considered Umm al-Dunīa - the largest Arabic-speaking country in the world; Yemen had arguably the dialect closest to the formal Arabic taught in a classroom; Lebanon had an exciting night life – not good for studying Arabic, but very enticing for someone in their early 20s; Morocco and Tunisia had well-established Arabic language study programs; and Jordan seemed a safe choice for someone like me who had not travelled extensively in the region.

But I chose Syria. It was a black box. Under U.S. sanctions, Syria had few English speakers, and little contact with Americans. I knew no one there and arrived with elementary classroom Arabic – essentially the equivalent of trying to ask for directions in England with a shaky grasp of Shakespearean English. I quickly learned how to apologize in Arabic for my bad Arabic. I remember first using the apology with a

shopkeeper who sold me an old brick-shaped Nokia cell phone. “No, no,” objected the middle-aged man with a bemused smile, “your Arabic is wonderful.”

My plan in Syria was to study Arabic and conduct my master’s thesis research on the state of opposition politics in one of the world’s most autocratic states. Syria’s opposition was in dire straits in the 2000s. Twice that decade, dissidents had publicly challenged the state and were quickly dismantled. When I arrived in 2008, Syria’s political opposition were mainly focused on supporting colleagues imprisoned after the second crackdown. One activist who helped me was Razan Zeitouneh. She explained how she was organizing fundraising efforts to pay for the legal fees of lawyers defending opposition leaders. Another was Muhanad al-Hasani, one of the lawyers trying to defend dissidents and secure their release. Razan Zeitouneh became one of the leaders of the protests during the Syrian revolution that started in March 2011. Two and a half years later, she disappeared, likely captured by a rebel militia in eastern Damascus, and has not been heard from since (Syria Direct, 2013). Muhanad al-Hasani was put in prison one year after I met him. Soon after he was released, he was outed in Wikileaks for meeting with American diplomats. He fled Syria just months before the 2011 uprising and now resides in New Jersey.

After living in Syria, I returned to the United States to finish my studies in 2009. After I graduated, I took my first job working at a university in Iraq. It was in Iraq that I learned more about civil wars, and it was from there that I observed Syria’s uprising transform into a civil war in 2011. In 2012, I moved from Iraq to the United States to work with Syrian friends on helping the international community understand Syria’s full-

fledged insurgency. Our starting assumption was that the United States and other powerful countries would have to get involved in Syria's conflict somehow, and they would need to be better informed than they had been during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. I joined a research consultancy called Caerus Associates to help aid agencies determine where to deliver assistance in Syria. We started training Syrian activists and reporters on how to observe and document conflict. They learned to count protest sizes, discreetly observe militia fighters stationed at checkpoints, record commodity prices, and safely conduct interviews for surveys. They and we believed it was important to help international organizations understand the complexity of Syria's metastasizing civil war. We wrote many reports on the local dynamics of Syria's conflict.

As we were documenting Syria's civil war, one aspect that emerged clearly was the number of foreigners who were joining the fight. For a week, while training a Syrian research team on the Turkish-Syrian border in 2013, we saw many people in local cafes dressed in ways that distinguished them as foreign, conservative, and religious. My colleagues, who were from Aleppo, could observe they were foreign from their accents and ascertain from snippets of their conversation that they were intending to enter Syria as combatants. We had read reports of foreigners entering Syria, but the scale we witnessed on the border, and the openness with which they met and discussed their plans to fight in Syria, made these reports seem real. Why were so many people travelling to fight in Syria? How were they getting there?

By the time we finished our research, it was February 2014. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was less than a year old but was dominating the Syrian rebellion. In

particular, ISIS dwarfed other insurgents' efforts to recruit foreign fighters. Within two years of its founding, ISIS would govern territory the size of Belgium (BBC, 2019). Helped by the sheer size of a foreign fighter force mobilized from all parts of the globe, ISIS's impact on the Syrian civil war became impossible to ignore. In the end, tens of thousands of people had come from many different places to fight in Syria, a country that many had never been to before.

Table 1.1 Largest Foreign Fighter Mobilizations Since 1900

Conflict	Group Type for Fighters	Estimates of Amounts
Syria (2011 – present)	Salafi-Jihadis, many to ISIS	36,000 - 100,000
Iraq (2011 – present) (2003 – 2009)	Salafi-Jihadis, including the predecessor of ISIS	11,000 - 26,000 3,000 - 5,000
Kosovo-Yugoslavia (1998-1999)	Homeland Calling	~ 3,000
Pakistan (1998-2015)	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	~ 2,000
Central African Conflicts (1997-present)	Various	7,000 - 10,000
Somalia (1991-2015)	Al Shabaab	500 - 1,500
Rwanda (1990-1994)	Rwandan Patriotic Front	~ 4,000
Kashmir (1989-present)	Salafi-Jihadis	2,000 - 3,000
Afghanistan (2001 – present) (1990 – 2001) (1978-1989)	Salafi-Jihadis	500 - 2,000 10,000 - 20,000 500 - 4,000
Angola (1975-1991)	Marxists, Anti- Communists, Mercenaries	~ 1,000
Israel/Palestine (1946 - 49)	MACHAL, Aliyah Bet Arab Forces	4,400 – 5,000 5,000 – 6,000
Spain (1936-1939)	International Brigades, Various anti-Communists	30,000 – 60,000 1,000 – 1,500
China (1923-1949)	Korea Volunteer Army	~40,000
Russia (1917-1922)	“Internationalists” in the Red Army	~50,000 (est. from 30-250,000)

Source: Adapted from Malet, 2015, p.10; Malet, 2020; updated by author for Syria and Iraq conflicts.

From its founding in 2013 until approximately the end of 2015, ISIS recruited an estimated 40,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries (Barrett, 2017). Most of ISIS's fighters were recruited before the end of 2015 because, by 2016, countries started restricting travel to Syria and ISIS started experiencing battlefield losses (Witte et al., 2016). Some reports claimed that the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization was "unprecedented" (Ackerman, 2014; Abdel Jelil et al., 2018). In reality, ISIS attracted many fighters, but perhaps slightly less than some of the largest recorded mobilizations of foreign fighters, including the International Communist Brigades in the Spanish Civil War (Malet, 2015), and those who fought in the Russian or Chinese civil wars (Malet, 2020) (see Table 1.1). Malet compared the mobilizations of Salafi-Jihadi foreign fighters and those of communist revolutionaries Malet (2015; 2020), and Kalyvas argued conceptually for research to compare ISIS and Marxist insurgencies as revolutionary armed groups interested in upending the social and political order in order to encourage more comparative work between insurgent groups (2015). As with Malet and Kalyvas, I believe it is more useful to situate ISIS foreign fighters in the context of other relevant historical mobilizations rather than hyperbolize it. This more measured approach will reduce the tendency towards exceptionalism while not making the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization any less worthy of study.

Within Syria, ISIS was not the only group recruiting foreign fighters in Syria's civil war. Thousands of foreigners joined other anti-Assad insurgents, and thousands more fought for the Syrian government, mainly brought to the conflict by Iran from countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Although this latter category of

foreign combatants is less frequently tallied, it likely numbered over ten thousand (Smyth, 2015). In total, the Syrian civil war in the 2010s had one of the largest total mobilizations of foreign fighters in the recorded history of conflict (Malet, 2015).

I began this introduction with a story of my decision to move to Syria because Syria lies at the heart of this dissertation. Syria was the destination for tens of thousands of combatants from over a hundred countries around the world. Yet, ironically, by focusing this dissertation on foreign fighters, I study on virtually every other nationality of combatants except Syrians. Nevertheless, much of the insights and early interest in the topic was a result of my earlier work studying Syria, my respect for my Syrian colleagues' hard work and sacrifice, and the lessons they shared with me when we worked together. More concretely, the quantitative data that I use to analyse ISIS's foreign fighter force was provided by a Syrian journalist who helped me better understand the Syrian conflict. In the past decade, I learned a lot about how to study conflict and contentious politics through my many conversations with Syrian friends and while living in Iraq. ISIS perpetrated incalculable harm in both these countries. I hope my friends living there find something of value in this work.

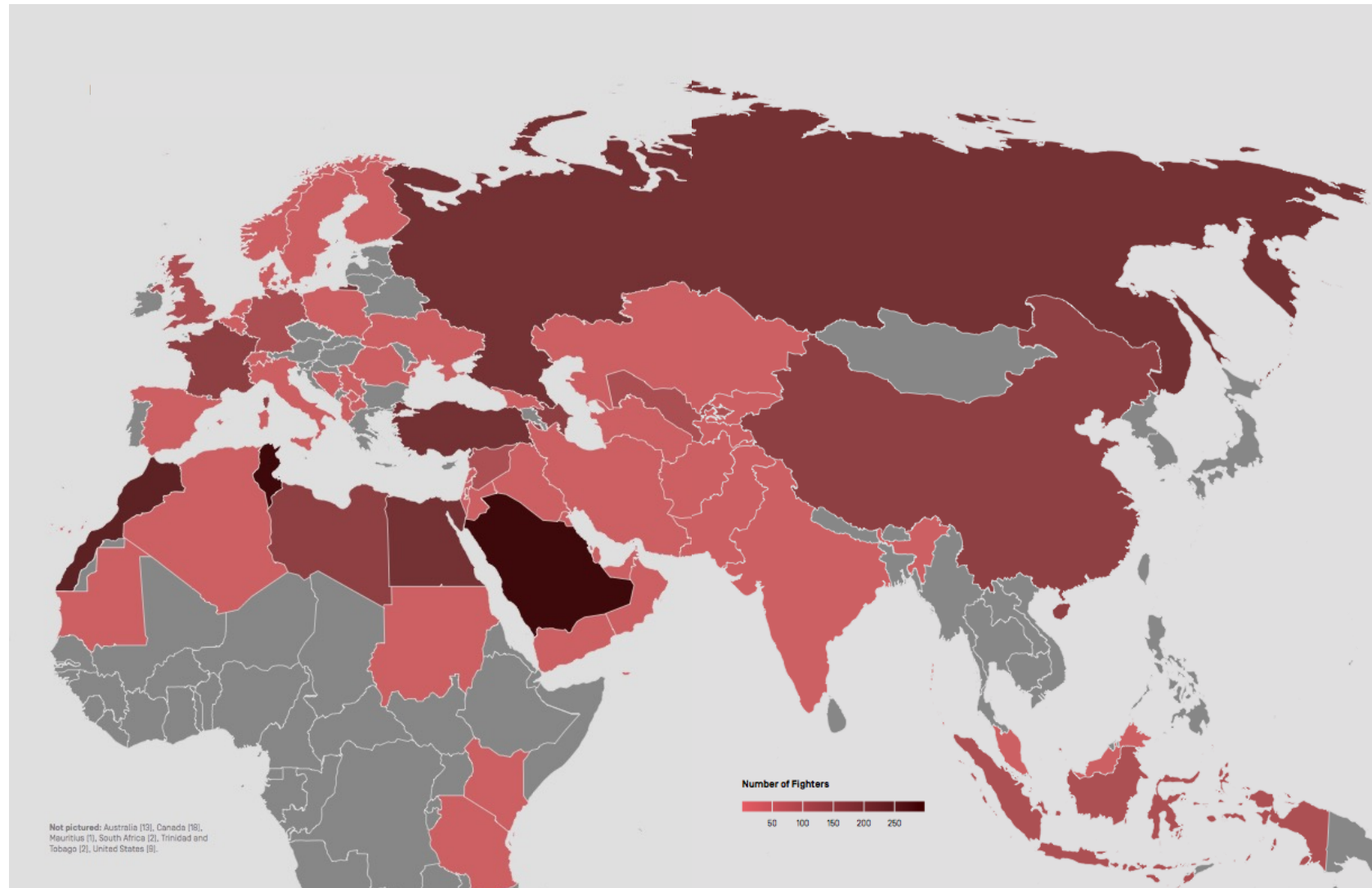
1.2 The Research Puzzle

In April 2016, a journalist working in Syria sent me a cache of files stolen from the ISIS internal security division that a defecting ISIS fighter had smuggled to Turkey. The files contained tens of thousands of individual Microsoft PowerPoint slides with copies of registration forms ISIS had used to record newly arrived foreign fighters

approximately from mid-2013 to mid-2014. Those forms included a lot of personal details about its foreign fighters, such as age, marital history, educational attainment, and professional history. They also included where the fighter came from – not just the country of their origin, but usually their hometown and sometimes even their exact home address. I translated these forms from Arabic and deduplicated them so that they represented approximately 3,500 unique registration forms of ISIS foreign fighters. I coded these data and included in my geo-coding not just where a fighter came from by country, but more specifically where they came from within the largest subnational administrative region in their home country. Countries call these regions different things – “governorates,” “regions,” “states” – I will call these regions “provinces” for uniformity.

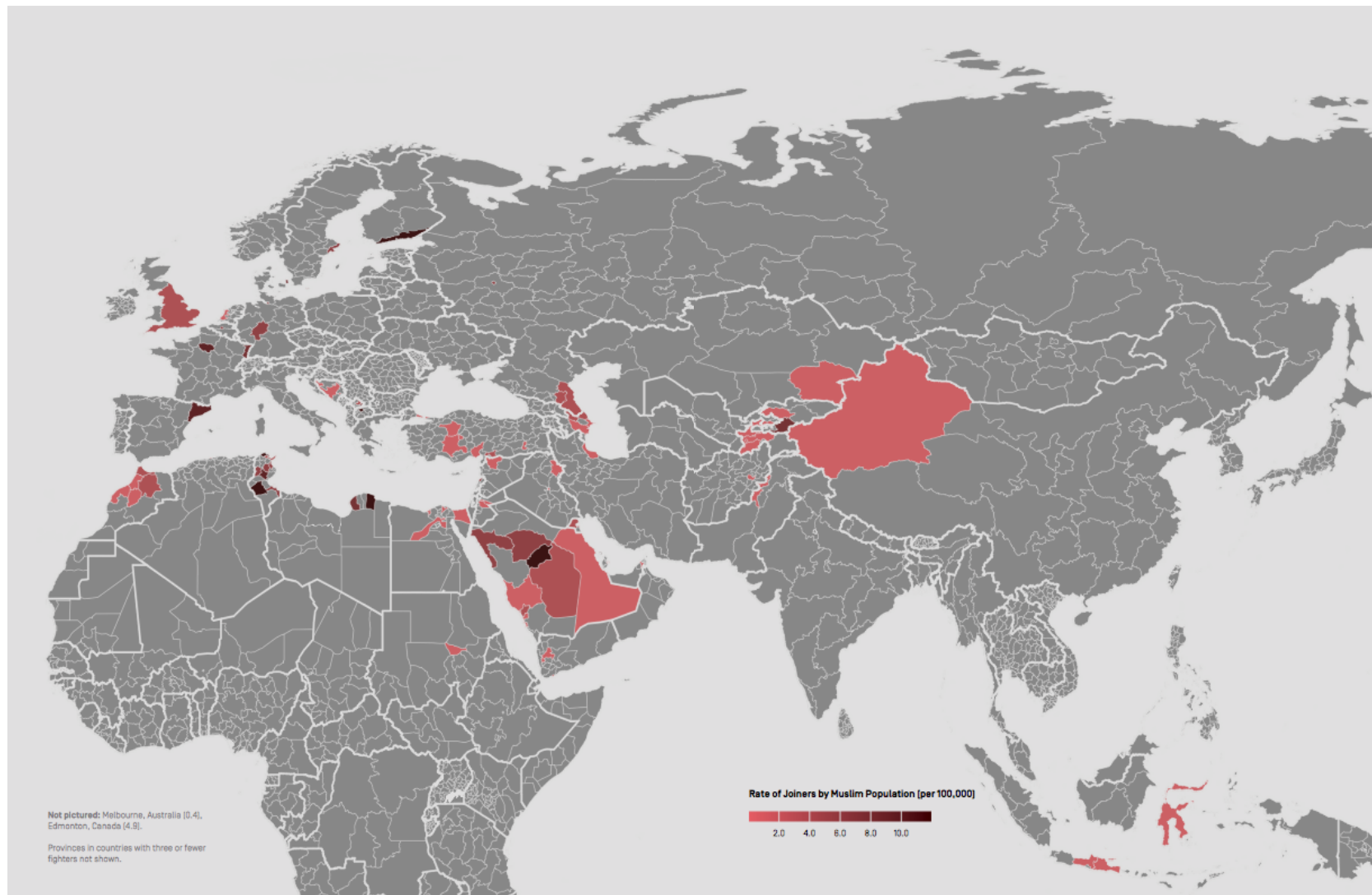
I focused on geo-coding the origins of these ISIS fighters at a subnational level because maps depicting the origins of ISIS foreign fighters published at the time were usually quite unhelpfully covered in various shades of red - darker reds for countries with more fighters, lighter shades for countries with fewer fighters. From these maps, it looked like fighters came from all corners of the globe (see Figure 1.1). Yet these countries are large and extraordinarily diverse. Moreover, I knew from my experience studying the local dynamics of Iraq’s conflict and Syria’s civil war that more detail would be needed if we wanted to really understand where these fighters were coming from.

Figure 1.1 Map of ISIS Foreign Fighter Origins by Country



Source: Rosenblatt, 2016

Figure 1.2 Map of ISIS Foreign Fighter Origins by Province



Source: Rosenblatt, 2016

But when I mapped the results, I found the fighters were not randomly distributed in their country of origin but were instead concentrated in specific provinces. In Libya, for example, 86 percent of ISIS fighters came from three provinces (Benghazi, Derna, and Sirte). In Saudi Arabia, two-thirds of ISIS fighters came from three provinces (Qassim, Riyadh, and Mecca). In Russia, regions which constituted 11 percent of the country's population were home to 72 percent of their ISIS foreign fighters. All of China's foreign fighters came from a single province (Xinjiang) which contains roughly 2 percent of China's population (see Figure 1.2).

The maps in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 were displayed in a paper I wrote in 2016 (Rosenblatt, 2016). The puzzle which started this PhD emerged from that paper. It was clear from Figure 1.2 that a disproportionate number of ISIS foreign fighter recruits came from specific localities. What was it about those places that led them to become ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs and not others, and what can we learn about these places to better understand why people become foreign fighters?

Although joining a foreign insurgency is rare and risky, in the hubs I learned that joining was normal, even prestigious. Some people joined because it was popular thing, while in other cases, going to fight in Syria was an escape – for example, to avoid imprisonment, torture, and possibly death at home. Other times, it was an opportunity – for example, to pursue a project abroad that was not possible at home. How did some choose the former over the latter? Why and under what conditions did some people become foreign fighters, as opposed to domestic insurgents? To refine my research question, I focus this dissertation specifically on foreign fighters from 17 countries in the

“Arabic-speaking world.”² This is because the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa comprised the largest plurality of foreign fighters to join ISIS (42 percent), yet they are a relatively understudied group as compared to fighters from countries in Western Europe (Barrett, 2017). In addition, the hubs identified in Figure 1.2 have more meaningful variation in the Arabic-speaking world where all the countries are majority Muslim. In countries with Muslim-minority populations, the locations of hubs mostly show where large Muslim communities settle (i.e., Paris). Finally, I knew the Arabic-speaking region well. I have studied the political, social, and economic issues of the region for over a decade and lived in and travelled extensively throughout the region for the past 15 years.

Finally, there is the question of why the phenomenon of Salafi-Jihadism, the ideology that has justified foreign fighter mobilizations to ISIS or Al Qaeda, has lasted so long. The dimension of Salafi-Jihadism that has supported foreign fighters from the Arabic-speaking world has lasted for over forty years, since the migration of “Afghan Arabs” to Afghanistan in 1979 (Hegghammer, 2010). As Malet observed (2015), this phenomenon is not unique in its size – there have been other waves of foreign fighters that have historically been larger, such as communist revolutionaries (Malet, 2020). Rather, Salafi-Jihadist foreign fighters (“transnational jihadists”) are historically unique because of their persistence – fighters do not mobilize for a single conflict but migrate

² The term “Arabic-speaking world” is used in this dissertation to denote 17 countries where 1) Arabic is the official or co-official language, 2) Arabic is the language spoken by the majority or large plurality of citizens, and 3) it excludes Syria and Iraq, since these countries could not provide foreign fighters to their own conflict. The 17 countries that constitute the “Arabic-speaking world” studied here are: Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Algeria, Israel/Palestine, Yemen, Mauritania, UAE, Qatar, Sudan, Oman.

from conflict to conflict. This Malet attributes to the policies of the home states for many jihadists, which provide no reintegration assistance and even revoke citizenship status of transnational jihadists (Malet, 2015). This remains true for many fighters who joined ISIS (Mekhennet and Warrick, 2018), which means some of ISIS's tens of thousands of foreign fighters are likely to participate in future conflicts or inspire new recruits. With that concern in mind, this dissertation presents a theory of how hubs of recruitment form that will help researchers better understand where ISIS's foreign fighters came from. By knowing more about how ISIS foreign fighters were recruited, I hope we can be better prepared when such mobilizations might arise in the future.

1.3 Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation contains eight chapters. After this introduction are theory and methodology chapters. Following those three chapters, my dissertation includes four empirical chapters, and Chapter Eight concludes by outlining the dissertation's key findings, future research opportunities, and practical implications. A more detailed outline of these chapters follows below.

The first empirical chapter (Chapter Four) assesses the demographic and socioeconomic factors that best describe where a "hub" of foreign fighter recruitment might emerge in the Arabic-speaking world. Using regression analysis and descriptive statistics, the first part of Chapter Four analyses differences in the types of fighters recruited from places with high concentrations of recruits ("hubs") and places where recruiting was more sporadic ("non-hubs"). This part of Chapter Four also compares

ISIS fighters' biographies to conditions in the places where they were recruited. The result will help us determine whether, and to what extent, ISIS fighters' profiles match up with the structural conditions of the places they came from. The second part of Chapter Four uses subnationally representative surveys from the 17 countries in the Arabic-speaking world to test factors that ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs had in common. The dependent variable of this regression analysis relies on geocoding of ISIS foreign fighter origins to a subnational level and statistically defining hubs in order to test where they emerged.

The next three chapters of this dissertation derive insights drawn from comparative ethnographic fieldwork. I study two neighbourhoods in Tunis, Tunisia that were as similar as possible but varied on the rate of foreign fighters. Tunisia had one of the highest rates of ISIS foreign fighters on a per capita basis in the world, and Tunis was one place where substantial recruitment occurred. The fieldwork in these chapters (five, six, and seven) will deepen our understanding of how structural conditions relate to the transformation of a locality into a recruitment hub. The two neighbourhoods in Tunis are Douar Hicher, where several hundred foreign fighters went to Syria, and Kabaria, where less than ten residents went to fight in Syria.³ Both neighbourhoods are large working-class suburbs with high crime rates and large populations of migrants who moved to Tunis from rural regions. I set up this comparison for two reasons: first, to test how the structural conditions found in Chapter Four relate to the process in which

³ The process of verifying this difference in the number of foreign fighters between Douar Hicher and Kabaria will be explained in more detail in Section 3.2.1 of Chapter Three.

a recruitment hub emerges, and two, to refine our understanding of what actually happens in a recruitment hub for foreign fighting.

Chapter Five describes how a hub of foreign fighter recruitment emerged in Douar Hicher. Chapter Five first describes Douar Hicher, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the “Greater Tunis” urban agglomeration. The latter half of Chapter Five focuses on how Salafi-Jihadi ideologues transformed Douar Hicher into a hub after the Tunisian revolution of 2011.

Chapter Six compares Douar Hicher with Kabaria. Kabaria is a neighbourhood that shares many of the same conditions as Douar Hicher in size, social history, level of unemployment, proximity to the city centre, and in social, political, and economic isolation. After Tunisia’s revolution, Salafi-Jihadis also made active efforts to recruit in Kabaria. Yet a recruitment hub did not form in Kabaria like it did in Douar Hicher – there were far fewer ISIS recruits from Kabaria than Douar Hicher. Chapter Six explains the difference between Kabaria and Douar Hicher that led one to become a recruitment hub while not the other. The goal of Chapter Six is not only to explain the factors that describe where militant recruitment occurs, but also to examine what potential counterfactuals might exist to foreign fighting.

Chapter Seven presents how the hub functioned in Douar Hicher once it formed by describing what recruitment was like based on the stories of people who tried to reach Syria as well as testimonies from the family and friends of foreign fighters. The end of Chapter Seven includes analysis of four contingent moments in Tunisia’s tense post-revolutionary politics that led a massive social movement to transform into a

recruiting network for foreign fighters. Rather than predetermined, the conclusion of the latter half of Chapter Seven is that a small number of people making key choices at critical junctures led Tunisia to become the country with the highest per capita rate of ISIS foreign fighters in the Arabic-speaking world. The key conclusion of this final empirical chapter is that hubs form in a similar way for a variety of activities, but what hubs form *for* (i.e., domestic insurgency, riots, protests, foreign fighting) is inherently unpredictable, turning on local context and choices made by a small number of people at key moments.

The dissertation concludes in Chapter Eight by summarizing its main findings. These findings describe the conditions that ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs had in common, how those conditions related to the process of a locality becoming a recruitment hub, what recruitment was like in hubs, and how these hubs formed for foreign fighting. The conclusion will end by providing recommendations for how researchers could apply the concept of hubs in future studies of militant group recruitment.

CHAPTER 2 | THEORY

“Hubs” - A New Theory of Foreign Fighter Recruitment

“The objective of Islamic *Jihad* is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its place an Islamic system of state rule. Islam does not intend to confine this rule to a single state or a handful of countries. The aim of Islam is to bring about a universal revolution. Although in the initial stages, it is incumbent upon members of the Party of Islam to carry out a revolution in the state system of the countries to which they belong, their ultimate objective is none other than a world revolution.”

- Abu'l al-A'la al-Mawdudi, 1995, p. 12.

Introduction

Two years into the Syrian civil war, in the spring of 2013, a group of senior jihadi insurgents met for five days in a village called Kafr Hamra on the outskirts of Aleppo, Syria's largest city. Over grilled chicken, french fries, and tea, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, then-commander of the Al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq, presided over a fateful debate on whether the group of jihadists should publicly declare an Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Baghdadi argued in favour of declaring a state. He believed that borders, citizens, institutions, and a functioning bureaucracy would offer a clear destination to potential recruits from all over the world. Unlike the elusive Al Qaeda, he claimed, a formalised state would attract recruits from among ordinary Muslims who might otherwise not know how to join (Doornbos and Moussa, 2016). One year later, in July 2014, Baghdadi changed the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to the “Islamic State,” declaring a global Islamic caliphate in a sermon on the pulpit of the al-

Nuri mosque in the Iraqi city of Mosul.⁴ His speech highlighted the diverse origins of the tens of thousands of foreign nationals who would join ISIS. “O Muslims everywhere,” he said,

Raise your head high, for today—by Allah’s grace—you have a state and a caliphate, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership...It is a caliphate that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami [Levantine], Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi [from northwest Africa], American, French, German, and Australian. Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another (Dabiq, 2014, 7).

By the time of Baghdadi’s speech and the capture of Mosul, ISIS controlled territory the size of Belgium (BBC, 2019), a population of six to nine million people, a cash surplus of up to \$2 billion (Johnston et al., 2019), and had as many as 12,000 foreign fighters in its ranks (Soufan, 2015).

To supplement its force throughout the Syrian civil war, ISIS conducted one of the most successful foreign fighter recruitment campaigns of any single insurgent group in the past 120 years (Malet, 2015). From 2013 through approximately the end of 2015, ISIS recruited over 40,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries (Barrett, 2017). Based on the size and scale of this mobilization, it might seem as though ISIS foreign recruits came from every corner of the globe. Yet the reality is far different: the vast majority of ISIS fighters were recruited from a small number of places. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, for example, 75 percent of ISIS foreign fighters were recruited from provinces that together comprised 11 percent of the MENA region’s total

⁴ Because most of this dissertation focuses on recruitment to ISIS before the group changed its name to the Islamic State, I refer to the group by its earlier name, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

population. This dissertation explores the paradox of why thousands of fighters, concentrated in a small number of localities, went to fight in a foreign war that was, for many, farther than they had ever travelled before in their lives, in a country most had never been to before.

This chapter explains the theory of foreign fighter recruitment hubs – how they work (2.1), where they fit in the study of civil wars in general, and insurgent group recruitment in particular (2.2), and what we know about who became foreign fighters (2.3).

2.1. A Theory of Recruitment Hubs

Why do recruitment hubs for foreign fighters emerge in some places and not others? Recruitment hubs are clear concentrations of recruits at disproportionate rates within certain regions. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theory for how recruitment hubs formed and functioned, and why they formed for foreign fighting and not domestic protests or rebellions. Questions this dissertation asks include: what are hubs and how do they emerge? How does recruitment work in hubs? Why are people recruited for foreign fighting in these hubs and not for other, similarly high-risk organized activity (i.e., rebellions or protests)?

Recruitment hubs benefitted from effects of scale (West, 2017). In economics, hubs form for certain industries because these industries benefit from economies of scale – the cost of producing a good decreases the more it is produced. Silicon Valley (Cohen and Fields, 1999) and Hollywood (Marvasti and Canterbury, 2001) are examples

of industries that benefit from scale effects. To produce large quantities of high-quality computer software or to develop commercially successful movies, companies need many people with specialized skills available to collaborate on a project quickly and inexpensively. It is far more costly to recruit these people if they are dispersed across the globe, and it is likewise costly for potential employees to attract a recruiters' attention if they are not already known to them somehow (Alarcón, 1999). Both of these industries, and many more, benefit from market concentration – the congregating of talent and the centralization of their production.

Organized high-risk activities, like recruitment for a transnational insurgent group like ISIS, benefit from economies of scale as well. Like the production of a piece of software or a film, ISIS required specialized experts working together in the same place. ISIS primary source documents, for example, reveal a complex bureaucracy of expertise – not just fighters, but jurists, ideologues, media experts, governors, doctors, engineers, and teachers – to help the ISIS statelet in Syria and Iraq function (al-Tamimi, 2015; Almohammad and Winter, 2019). Recruitment must be similarly complex to meet the personnel demands of running a formal state. It required highly skilled recruiters, media-savvy communications experts, charismatic organizers, and savvy ideologues who could bind new joiners to the movement through a carefully designed program of indoctrination. Crucially, it also required well-connected members who could cultivate important ties to people who might help the movement in other ways. This included wealthy donors, high-level government functionaries, and even skilled legal advisors (Dickinson, 2013). Petersen's spectrum of support, which accounted for ways people

could support or sustain a protest movement without necessarily becoming formal members, applies to ISIS fighters as well: many individuals could support ISIS without ever formally joining it (2001).

Geographic concentrations of recruits will begin to emerge when a group carrying out organized, high-risk activity seeks new joiners. This dissertation will focus on ISIS's recruitment of foreign fighters from the Arabic-speaking world in 2013-14. During this time period and in this region, there were wide-spread public recruitment campaigns. Some research focuses on the online dimension of this effort (Stern and Berger, 2015). But there were extreme concentrations of recruits in certain locations (Rosenblatt, 2016), which suggests that a great deal of the recruitment took place in person. The relative freedom to organize occurred because there was a political opportunity in most states for potential ISIS fighters to mobilize. Some states, like Tunisia, experienced political transformations caused by the 2010-11 Arab Spring demonstrations (Zelin, 2020). Other states, like Saudi Arabia, widely supported efforts to recruit rebels to fight the Syrian government (Dickinson, 2013). Sometimes, as in the case of Libya, both were true (Wehrey, 2018). Left unchecked during this time, the result was that certain neighbourhoods and towns became centres of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment. As will become clear in the dissertation, these hubs were both statistically measurable and locally observable. They are also not without precedent for foreign fighters. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi reportedly praised a Tunisian border town for sending him so many fighters while he commanded al-Qaeda in Iraq from 2003-06: "If Ben

Guerdane [the Tunisian town] had been located next to Fallujah, we would have liberated Iraq” (Ragharvan, 2016).

This dissertation finds that while the form and function of hubs may be similar across a variety of organized, high-risk activities, what hubs form *for* (i.e., foreign fighting, riots, protests, domestic rebellions) varies in large part due to highly contingent events. These include breaks in patterns of past relationships, often a result of choices made by several individuals at critical junctures where several potential alternatives existed (Ermakoff, 2015). In the case of post-revolutionary Tunisia, a group of people formed a social movement called Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST). In a matter of several years, their social movement transformed into a protest movement, and from a protest movement into an incipient insurgency, and finally from an incipient insurgency to an officially designated ISIS-affiliated terrorist group that facilitated the departure of many members to fight in Syria’s civil war. Each transitional period exhibited what Kurzman called “conditions of confusion” where “the normal rules of behaviour had been suspended” (2004, p. 135; 162). During those moments of uncertainty, Kurzman argued that people felt a great urge to follow what others around them were doing (2004, p. 135). There was great contingency during these periods – had key people made different choices during those key moments when the group transitioned from a social movement to an ISIS feeder organization, the same hubs which facilitated ISIS foreign fighters could have emerged instead as nodes of political protest or even recruitment centres for a domestic insurgency.

Hubs can form around a variety of organized, high risk activity. Part of the empirical research presented in this dissertation compares two neighbourhoods in the capital city of Tunisia which shared many of the same characteristics but varied on the outcome: one neighbourhood became a hub of recruitment for foreign fighters while the other did not. Hubs formed in both neighbourhoods, however for different outcomes: while one neighbourhood became a hub for foreign fighting with ISIS, the other was a hub for organized criminal activity. In the latter case, the organized crime hub facilitated the illegal transit of goods from Europe into Tunisia, and the illegal migration of Tunisians to Europe. The contingency on which foreign fighting hubs are based (explained more in Chapter Seven) and the difference between when a hub emerges for insurgency and organized crime (Chapter Six) are two reasons why a theory of recruitment hubs can cover how people join organized high-risk activity, but may not be able to explain the outcome of that activity. Kurzman urges researchers to be honest about what their models can and cannot explain (2004). In this case, a theory of hubs can explain certain structural factors about how hubs form and function, but not what those hubs ultimately do.

This dissertation started from the empirical observation that hubs of recruitment existed for the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization in the Arabic-speaking world. By focusing on how recruitment works in hubs as compared to places that were not hubs, this dissertation makes clear that hubs of recruitment shaped the process of joining ISIS in distinct ways. Differences in where recruitment hubs formed, and the way recruitment in hubs changed the types of people recruited in them, make clear that research on

recruitment into any high-risk organized activity needs to account for this nuance before inferring motivations from their samples. As Petersen argued, “perhaps the most important question is not why men rebel, but how they rebel” (1993, p. 41).

To develop a theory of recruitment hubs, this dissertation describes the process of recruitment starting from the structural conditions that many hubs share in common, to how they form, and how people are recruited in them (see 2.3.3 for a more thorough outline of the argument of this dissertation). The benefit of a comprehensive approach is that it aims to explain fully how hubs fit within the recruitment process in order to present a testable theory that future research can investigate and refine (King et al., 1994, p. 19). The downside is that, by trying to explain the totality of the phenomenon, this dissertation is descriptive. It may not provide detailed, causal explanations of each component part, but this dissertation can introduce new avenues of research and inquiry (see Section 8.3.1 for more on research implications).

For example, this dissertation describes how a hub formed in Tunisia after its political transformation in January 2011. Yet future research could identify other pathways towards hubs forming in different contexts for the same outcome (i.e., joining ISIS) or different pathways for hubs forming in different contexts for different outcomes (i.e., protest mobilization or rebel group recruitment). Further testing the causal mechanisms that underpin where hubs form, describing in-depth how they form, or exploring how hubs form differently for different outcomes are all potential avenues for further research.

2.2. Conceptualization and Theoretical Framework

To develop a theory of recruitment hubs, this section situates this research within the literature of previous work on foreign fighting and insurgent group recruitment. It defines foreign fighters, introduces the paradox of joining an insurgency fighting in another country's civil war, compares this project to other research on foreign fighters, and connects this research with the more established literature on insurgent group recruitment.

2.2.1. What are Foreign Fighters?

Despite the likely presence of foreign fighters throughout the history of conflict, the topic has only recently been subjected to focused scholarly research. As a result, scholarship has not yet settled on a definition of what a foreign fighter is. Some scholars classify foreign fighters as non-national citizens who *volunteer* to fight on one side of another country's conflict (Hegghammer, 2010). But that raises an unhelpful burden of proof on the researcher to determine whether fighters received some kind of compensation during the time of their fighting. Instead, this dissertation will rely on Malet's definition of a foreign fighter as a "non-citizen of a state experiencing civil conflict who arrives from an external state to join an insurgency" (2013, p. 9). This definition is preferable because it includes any individual who joins any insurgent group in any foreign country's civil conflict – without having to determine their motivations, modes of arrival, or methods of payment. Malet distinguishes between foreign fighters and mercenaries mainly on two fronts: first, that foreign fighters join insurgencies, while mercenaries

generally are supported by states; and second, that foreign fighters are often amateurs, while mercenaries are usually trained soldiers.

The definition above implies that foreign fighters are transnational insurgents. Indeed, Malet argues that transnational insurgents and foreign fighters could be used interchangeably (2013). Yet one of the reasons why foreign fighters are so new in the academic literature, and one of the reasons why Malet and many others, including this dissertation, prefer to use it, is because the term foreign fighters is more popularly accessible. Malet traces the use of “foreign fighter” to militaries and journalists involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s, where the term was used as a way for the United States and its coalition forces to distinguish between the nationalities of the insurgents they were fighting (2013, p. 216-7). As the term grew more popular, it demanded legal clarification. So, in September 2014, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) used the term “foreign terrorist fighters” in order to draw from terrorism law to prosecute cases against individuals “who travel or attempt to travel to a state other than their states of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts, or the providing or receiving of terrorist training” (S/RES/2178, 2014).

In 2014, the UNSC was mainly concerned with foreign fighters joining ISIS. But, as Kalyvas has argued about ISIS (2015), and more generally earlier (2004), terrorism more often limits our analytical lens rather than widens it. Terrorism is a tactic often reflective of extreme weakness and the term might not even apply to ISIS in many respects (Kalyvas, 2015). This dissertation may reference literature on terrorism, chiefly

because some terrorism research describes a process of joining through similar pathways as those who became foreign fighters. But Salafi-Jihadism has a well-developed curriculum of terms, ideas, recruitment strategies, and indoctrination for new joiners that apply to insurgency more broadly, not necessarily terrorism specifically (Maher, 2016). This is why it is important to emphasize that foreign fighters are perhaps more accurately described as transnational insurgents, rather than terrorists (i.e., as argued in Malet, 2013). Labelling them objectively has the advantage, as Kalyvas writes, “of eschewing the temptation of exceptionalism and bringing to the fore the rich experience of revolutionary insurgencies...and more generally the wealth of insights generated by the comparative study of civil wars” (2015, p. 42).

Despite great focus on the type of foreign fighters discussed here, it is worth noting that there are potentially many more “foreign” fighters participating in an internationalized civil war like Syria’s. In addition to the “foreign fighters” that are the subject of this study, a second category of “foreign” fighters are those of limited training who fight on the side of the state in a civil war. Iran, for example, has forcibly deployed thousands of Afghans, Pakistanis, Iraqis, and other nationalities to fight for the Syrian government (Smyth, 2015). A third category of foreign fighters join civil conflicts in other countries as part of a foreign militia. The Lebanese militia Hezbollah, for example, has played a crucial role supporting the Syrian government in Syria’s civil war. The difference between this category and the second is formalization and training. Some Afghan nationals were arrested for working illegally in Iran and sent to the Syrian civil war on the promise their participation would reduce their jail sentence and possibly lead to a work

visa (Reuter, 2015). Whereas Hezbollah fighters arrive in Syria as part of a more formal unit and, in many cases, with at least some combat training (Smyth, 2015). A potential fourth category of foreign fighters, slightly better trained and more legally formalized, are private security contractors. These include companies like the Wagner Group or Academi (formerly Blackwater), defined by Singer as for-profit organizations that provide services linked to warfare (2002). And fifth and finally are professional soldiers formally affiliated with a state government and governed by laws of war.

This typology of different types of “foreign” fighters might seem abstract, but it should serve as an important reminder that there are at least five categories of non-native combat forces that can participate at the same time in a foreign country’s civil war. We cannot understand the impact of foreign fighters – the type defined by Malet and the focus of this study – on conflict without also considering these other categories of foreign combatants. These categories are important for two reasons. First, from the perspective of many residents in countries like Iraq or Afghanistan, for example, it was the Americans who represented the largest contingent of foreign fighters in their countries for the first two decades of the 21st century, not the predominantly Arab Muslim “foreign” fighters (Li, 2019).

Second, foreign fighters studied in this dissertation often justify their deployment by framing their mobilization as a defensive struggle against a foreign aggressor – essentially, that becoming a foreign fighter is necessary to fight against other foreign fighters (Malet, 2013; Hegghammer, 2020). Unlike the other categories of foreign fighting presented above, the paradox of the type of foreign fighters studied here is that

they incur significant personal risk. Foreign fighters have little if any military training, they travel thousands of miles to countries they have never visited before, and they join the rebel side which is, on average, 15 times weaker than the state they are fighting (Stanton, 2020). Meanwhile, the benefits of foreign fighting are limited and vague. Many go without the promise of payment, (Malet, 2013) and participate in an armed struggle that, if won, offers diffuse benefits (i.e., an “Islamic” state).

Why do people become foreign fighters? Often, they are more motivated by ideological factors rather than material ones - they require “an abstraction of their core idea” that is “generalizable to other situations” (Malet, 2013, p. 27). In the case of ISIS foreign fighters, recruiters drew on *farḍ al-ʿayn* (“individual obligation”), a Salafi-Jihadi tenet popularized forty years ago by Abdullah Azzam to persuade earlier generations of fighters to confront the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. “If [disbelievers] approach an inch ... towards the land of Muslims,” Azzam argued, then “jihad becomes *farḍ al-ʿayn* [an individual obligation] upon every Muslim” (Hegghammer, 2020; Zulfikar, 2017). Azzam delivered his speech explicitly in global terms. He stated that the obligation, in this case to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, applied to Muslims “all over the world” (Zulfikar, 2017). This tenet of Salafi-Jihadi jurisprudence runs straight from Azzam through AQ and to ISIS, which used the same terminology in their propaganda. In “Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You,” for example, ISIS propagandists wrote “As long as there is an inch of territory left for us to reclaim, jihad will continue to be a *personal obligation* on every single Muslim” (Dabiq, 2016a, p. 30 [emphasis added]).

Azzam's speeches during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan helped spark a movement within Salafi-Jihadism towards the use of violence to catalyse political change. Salafism is a revivalist movement in Sunni Islam that calls for a return to traditions practiced by the first three generations of scholars after the Prophet Mohammed. A smaller subset of Salafis believe in the importance of using violence to restore these traditions. These are Salafi-Jihadis, a term this dissertation relies on at length in particular during the Tunisia case study chapters (five, six, and seven), since most recruits in Tunisia first became members of a Salafi-Jihadi movement before joining ISIS as foreign fighters. Once these recruits became foreign fighters, they could be described as "transnational jihadis" to distinguish them from Salafi-Jihadis who may pursue political change through violence at home. When this dissertation uses the term Salafi-Jihadism, it imports Maher's detailed description of the ideology's aims and intellectual history (2016).

2.2.2. Recent Research on Foreign Fighters in Conflict

Scholarship on foreign fighters in conflict emerged in reaction to the rise of AQ during the U.S. invasion of Iraq and struggles in the war in Afghanistan in the 2000s (i.e., Debat, 2004; Fishman and Felter, 2007; Watts, 2008; Noonan, 2009; Stenerson, 2011) it grew exponentially in the 2010s, mainly to explain the tens of thousands of people who joined ISIS from around the world (i.e., Hafez, 2013; Carter et al., 2014; Bakke, 2014; Byman, 2015; Braithwaite and Chu 2017; Chu and Braithwaite, 2017). Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict and the rise of ISIS, scholars have increasingly focused

on the phenomenon of foreign fighters in the Islamic world, usually relying on open-source material (e.g., Joffé, 2016; Mishali-Ram, 2018; Benmelech and Klor, 2018).

Most studies on foreign fighters that collect or analyse primary sources (i.e., in-person interviews, reviews of social media content and/or court case materials) have focused on transnational jihadis from countries with Muslim minority populations. In Western Europe, Weggemans, et al., for example, focused on Dutch jihadis (2014), Coolsaet studied Belgians (2016), Hjelt studied Danish jihadis from Arhus (2020), Holman studied French and Belgian foreign fighters (2015), and Reynolds and Hafez studied German foreign fighter networks (2017). In North America, Vidino and Hughes used ISIS administrative materials and social media research to create the largest database of American fighters who joined ISIS (2015). And Dawson and Amarasingam studied foreign fighters from Canada through interviews with their family and friends (2017).

Table 2.1 Estimates of the Geographic Origins of ISIS Foreign Fighters

Region	Estimated Number of ISIS Foreign Fighters	Percent of Total Estimate
Middle East / North Africa	12,410	42%
Former Soviet Republics	8,717	29%
Western Europe	5,778	19%
South and Southeast Asia	1,568	5%
Balkans	845	3%
North America	444	1%
Total	29,762	100%

NOTE: The country-specific estimates above constitute the portion of the total ISIS foreign fighter mobilization whose origins could be located to a specific country. The total number of fighters above (29,762) is not the overall estimate of the number of ISIS foreign fighters (over 40,000). Barrett (2017) presented the “Middle East” as separate from the “Maghrib.” Given their linguistic and cultural similarities, Table 2.1 combines the two as “Middle East / North Africa.” Source: Barrett, 2017

Less common is primary source research on foreign fighters in the Muslim-majority countries of the Arabic-speaking world, even though more foreign fighters who joined ISIS came from there than any other region (Barrett, 2017; see Table 2.1 above). Hegghammer (2010) presented the most in-depth study into the origins of the transnational jihadist movement in the Arabic-speaking world. Focusing on Saudi Arabia, Hegghammer described the factors behind the earliest mobilizations of “Afghan Arabs” who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s. His argument was that the first waves of transnational jihadists grew from 1) a stateless diaspora of political Islamists exiled from countries like Egypt or Syria and living in Saudi Arabia, and 2) political pressure on the Saudi royal family to bolster its religious credentials through support for pan-Islamic causes. These two factors led the Saudi government, along with the United States for other reasons, to support fighters who confronted Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Hegghammer, 2010). The Afghanistan conflict sparked the transnational dimension of Salafi-Jihadism to include religiously sanctioned warfare anywhere in the Muslim world. Transnational jihadists from there joined conflicts in Libya, Algeria, Egypt, the Balkans, Chechnya, Somalia, and, by the 2000s, back in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Within research on foreign fighter recruitment, I believe this dissertation fills two important gaps. First, it will add original research on how foreign fighters were recruited from the Arabic-speaking world. There is growing attention on foreign fighters, yet there remains comparatively little primary source research conducted on their recruitment pathways from the Middle East and North Africa region, despite the region constituting 42 percent of ISIS’s foreign fighters, more than any other (Table 2.1).

Second, the study of hubs advances research on the subnational variation in foreign fighter recruitment. This approach fills a much-needed gap between studies which infer individual motivations from macro-economic data, and qualitative studies, which struggle to generalize motivations from individual interviews. The challenges posed by these two approaches in the study of foreign fighters are explained below.

Most quantitative studies that try to infer individual motivations for becoming a foreign fighter using country-level factors may be too general to have real explanatory power. Although such studies (i.e., Benmelech and Klor, 2018; Abdel Jelil et al., 2018) present statistically significant correlations, they assert countrywide conditions that fail to account for variation within countries. The fact that there are clear concentrations of fighters in regions *within* countries (Rosenblatt, 2016) indicates that a more detailed examination of fighters' origins is essential to understanding the contexts in which fighters are mobilized.

Meanwhile, qualitative studies that interview actual foreign fighters are informative but struggle to generalize their results. One chief reason is that they select on the dependent variable – we are unsure of how individual joiners made their decisions to become foreign fighters in the context of choices made by others around them (Geddes, 1990). Additionally, even if respondents were selected from a perfectly randomized sample, researchers must grapple with the subconscious psychological biases of their respondents. For example, a study of Canadian foreign fighters by Dawson and Amarasingam acknowledged that all of their respondents' answers were distorted by

significant ideological indoctrination, which makes it hard to determine in hindsight their reasons for becoming a foreign fighter (2017).

Individual-level research on foreign fighters also struggles to generalize because of the complex, context-dependent nature of individual-level radicalisation. Hamid, a researcher who has psycho-analysed transnational jihadis using neural imaging, concluded that “multiple factors interact in complex ways that cause radicalization to emerge in individual people and groups... [controlling for] one factor does not cause the system to collapse but instead to evolve in ways that may be positive or negative” (2017, p. 1). In summarising four decades of psychological research interviewing insurgents, Horgan concluded that the findings had not produced “any profile” for joiners (2003). The conclusion of these studies is that no single formula can describe why individuals become foreign fighters. Instead, a complex set of factors interact with each other in such a way that makes it difficult to generalise individual-level research into parsimonious theory.

The existence of hubs focuses attention away from the complex question of why people become foreign fighters and towards questions on which research can gain greater traction, such as where and how foreign fighters are recruited. The meso-level approach proposed here connects the micro, individual-level analysis with macro-level dynamics like international relations or state policies. In hubs, people experience recruitment differently depending on certain situational factors where they are recruited. But these factors are also affected by political opportunities made possible locally, nationally, and, in the case of foreign fighters, in whatever foreign country is experiencing

conflict. As Chapter Four will show, hubs were gateways for large numbers of new, mostly younger fighters to join ISIS who often lacked combat experience. That meant *where* fighters were recruited affected not just how many people were recruited, but also who was recruited. This connection between place, space, interpersonal relationships, and the individual experience underscores the importance for multilevel research on the recruitment of foreign fighters. The findings presented in this dissertation on recruitment hubs demonstrate that a multilevel approach connecting subnational variation at the meso level can add value to macro- and micro-level factors (i.e., as developed by Kalyvas, 2003; 2006; Wood, 2003; Balcells and Justino, 2014).

2.2.3. Insurgent Group Recruitment Beyond Foreign Fighters

All questions regarding participation in an insurgency – domestic or foreign – start at the collective action problem. The collective action problem was popularized by Olson (1965), an economist who challenged previous literature that assumed individuals with common interests would simply cooperate with each other. Instead, Olson made a persuasive argument about the paradox of rebellion that has been covered so extensively that this dissertation will summarize it only briefly.

The collective action problem has three assumptions. First, it assumes that individuals weigh the costs and benefits of participating in a collective action. Second, individuals usually value goods that can only be acquired through joint cooperation (e.g., community safety, property rights). They have to weigh the acquisition of these more widely dispersed benefits against the mostly personal costs (i.e., time, effort, and risk) it

will take acquire them. Third, the choice of a single individual to participate in a common effort to achieve a public benefit has little bearing on the success of that effort. As a result of these three factors, any rational individual would choose to abstain from participating in the collective action. In other words, they would choose to “free ride” on the efforts of others and enjoy the spoils of the public goods after they are acquired.

Olson’s work set up a paradox: why would anyone put themselves at personal risk to achieve a public good that is just as easily shared with participants and non-participants alike? Gurr was one of the first to respond to the challenge of the collective action paradox as explained by Olson (1970). Gurr suggested that relative deprivation – when people’s expectations about their life chances exceed their actual experience – motivates groups of individuals to rebel. Gurr specified three levels of deprivation: “aspirational deprivation,” in which expectations rise against a static reality, “decremental deprivation,” in which aspirations remain constant while reality worsens, and “progressive deprivation,” in which expectations rise while reality declines. Gurr posited that these deprivations lead to anger, which leads to conflict. The greater the deprivation, according to Gurr, the greater the size and risk of conflict. But Gurr’s analysis invited many critics. Tilly, for example, argued that this explanation is unfalsifiable (1971). Everyone who rebels is angry, Tilly explained, but not everyone who is angry rebels. People hold grievances across the world, but few of them start a war. What actually explains why some people rebel, while many others do not?

Other scholars disputed Gurr’s argument that grievances matter at all for participants in an insurgency. Collier and Hoeffler, for example, found that “greed” –

opportunities for personal gain as a result of participating in conflict – are more likely convincing people to join an insurgency than grievance. They argue that individual incentives are not only more salient than grievances but are also more important to an individual's choice to rebel than Olson's original paradox first assumed (2003, p. 563). Other research, such as Weinstein (2006), agreed with the draw of personal gain in conflict, but only in certain circumstances, noting that opportunistic rebellion is a greater driver of participation to insurgencies fighting conflicts in resource-rich countries.

This "greed and grievance" framework, as it is sometimes called, is but one of many that probe the individual motivations for participating in an armed rebellion. Another framework is the "push" vs. "pull" paradigm, where "greed" incentives fit the framework of individual "pull" factors – a potential fighter is *pulled* to the battlefield by, for example, the allure of a salary or the prospect of looting during war. Conversely, "grievances" may *push* fighters to enter the fray based on various frustrations, such as discrimination, marginalization, relative deprivation, ethnic inequality or exclusion (UNODC, 2018).

Kalyvas rejected the greed and grievance paradigm as a false choice between a Hobbesian war of all against all or a Schmittian war of "abstract and impersonal enmity" (2003, p. 475). Rather, Kalyvas introduced the key framework of "public and private identities and actions" that take place within "complex and ambiguous" conflicts that "foster an apparently massive, though variable, mix of identities and actions" that come to define and shape conflict in the aggregate rather than occurring by coincidence during conflict (2003, p. 475). These local dynamics may be safely ignored for the

purposes of macro-level analysis, Kalyvas argued, but they cannot be glossed over in a dissertation project like this one, which focuses on the recruitment of tens of thousands of fighters who travelled hundreds or thousands of miles away to join one faction of a civil war in a country they have never visited before. War activates fault lines and mobilizes people and groups based on local cleavages, according to Kalyvas, which means, for ISIS foreign fighters, that those who joined ISIS did so for a variety of reasons in a diverse number of places. Focusing on where those places are, and what happened in them, may be more effective to understanding the different reasons foreign fighters joined ISIS rather than general explanations that fit one broad category or another.

Kalyvas' work and others (i.e., Wood, 2003; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2005; Eck, 2010) have shown that research on recruitment into insurgencies should combine the study of individual choices with the social dimensions and endogenous processes involved in how and why people choose to join a rebellion. People do not rebel alone. What potential recruits think other people are doing when conflict or confrontation begins is crucial to understanding how recruitment occurs in some places and not in others.

To account for the social nature of participating in armed conflict, Granovetter (1978) modelled individual incentives as "thresholds" to understand whether or not someone would participate in a collective action. Many individual-level theories ignored group dynamics, Granovetter argued, often assuming "a simple relation between collective results and individual motives" (1978, p. 1421). Instead of a "simple counting of preferences," Granovetter modelled how certain networks can become loci of protest

or rebellion if a critical number of people within that network choose to act (1978, p. 1421). Individuals do not make decisions to participate in rebellion by themselves, their choices are a product of how they interpret events, including whether others participate. This insight led to additional research on thresholds, including by Elster, who used assurance games to develop preference distributions based on personality types (1990), and Petersen, who studied the effect of community composition on how these initial distributions of thresholds for rebellion are formed (1993).

Although this threshold model made explicit that one person's decision could affect those others make, most of this work focused on the choice of whether or not to protest. Tilly took this insight a step further: he analysed not only how the choice to participate in a rebellion might spread, but also in the generation, diffusion, and implementation of "violence-promoting ideas" (2003, p. 8). Wood also emphasized how ideas influenced collective action in the Salvadorean civil war (2003). Many villages in El Salvador shared similar hardships, and likely, similar grievances, Wood argued. But the places that supported the insurgency were not necessarily the most aggrieved. Instead, the places with the strongest support for the rebellion were places where an "insurgent political culture" had taken hold, leading rebels in these places to make sacrifices they believed were meaningful (2003, p. 225). In these accounts, social interaction was key: people were influenced by what others did and believed. The spread of ideas within a defined group could facilitate a collective action before the opportunity to act was ever presented.

Wood concluded that most rebellions start when an idea to rebel spreads in advance within a committed in-group (2003). Ethnic minority groups are a common setting for this dynamic, which is why so much research explicitly studies how their presence affects the likelihood of conflict (e.g., Sambanis, 2001; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Kalyvas, 2008). Although the coding of ethnic rebellions varies, one synthesis of the ethnic conflict literature estimated that 75 percent of all civil wars since WWII are ethnonationalist conflicts – wars fought in the name of national liberation or ethnic autonomy (Wimmer et al., 2009). One reason why ethnic minority populations facilitate rebellion is they are pre-established networks of high-trust relationships that facilitate the spread of ideas and restrict the leaking of information to outsiders (Lewis, 2017). Another reason is they control co-ethnic populations through social norms (Petersen, 2002; Campana and Varese, 2013). If these ethnic groups are targets of exclusion (Cederman et al., 2013; Gurr, 1993), then they are ideally placed to facilitate an “insurgent political culture” – insurgents within an ethnic group can operate in relative secrecy while propagating their message of rebellion within their community (Wood, 2003).

Even though armed rebellions by ethnic or religious minorities are an important dimension of the study of how rebellions start, there are other places for insurgent ideas to spread. Horizontal inequalities describe how persistent gaps in access to economic, political, cultural, or social resources can lead to the development of an insurgent political culture by any “culturally defined group” (Stewart, 2008; Cederman et al., 2011). Horizontal inequalities are multidimensional gaps in access to resources experienced by

groups of people at the same time. This approach synthesizes earlier work on “vertical” inequalities – the push or pull factors described previously and experienced at the individual level – with the fact that rebellions occur because groups of people choose to act collectively. The presence of horizontal inequalities, Stewart argues, increases the likelihood that insurgent ideas spread, rebel groups form, and conflict emerges (2008). Ethnic or sectarian minority populations often face such inequalities (Horowitz, 1985; Gurr, 1993), but so do people of different classes, tribes, and races – depending on the context.

This dissertation does not explicitly test for horizontal inequalities. The data for doing so remain limited (Kuppens and Langer, 2019), which is why few quantitative studies have thus far employed it successfully (i.e., Cederman et al., 2011; Cederman, 2014). Yet the theory of horizontal inequalities provides a useful frame for understanding where hubs might form because it moves beyond individual-level motivations and tries to connect structural conditions with group dynamics. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven of this dissertation describe two groups of people who lived in the *ḥūma* (the ‘hood’) – culturally, politically, and economically isolated working-class neighbourhoods that were often where ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs emerged after Tunisia’s revolution. But as helpful a frame horizontal inequalities may be in identifying potential recruitment hubs, they have limited value in explaining what hubs form for. As this dissertation will show, certain contingent events where multiple possible futures existed simultaneously (Ermakoff, 2015), influenced hubs to form for foreign fighting rather than protest or domestic insurgency.

Nevertheless, any theory of insurgent recruitment – foreign fighter or otherwise – needs to account for group dynamics because joining is inherently social. Many empirical studies of recruitment show that people are brought in by someone they know and more often than not join in groups of two or more (i.e., Sageman, 2004; Magouirk et al., 2009; UNDP, 2017; Bryson, 2017). Recruitment relies on relationships because joining is highly risky. Some insurgent groups, including ISIS, expected new joiners to provide a reference before they were admitted (Rosenblatt, 2016; Abouzeid, 2018). As a result of the inherently social dimension of foreign fighting, we need to think more about the group effects of recruitment. “[P]eople with particular shared identities or goals,” as Stewart argued, “attack others in the name of the group. While young men may fight because they are unemployed, uneducated and have few other opportunities, they also generally fight out of loyalty to a group (or sometimes to an ideology or cause)” (2008, p. 11).

But group grievances generated by long-lasting horizontal inequalities are rarely enough to cause an armed rebellion in and of themselves. As Tilly and others have emphasized: grievances, frustrations, and inequality are everywhere. Yet there are not revolutions everywhere. It is the opportunity to rebel that determines where rebellions occur, not vice-versa (1971). This dissertation will show how opportunity was also a crucial condition to a recruitment hub forming.

2.3. What are “Hubs” and Why do they Matter?

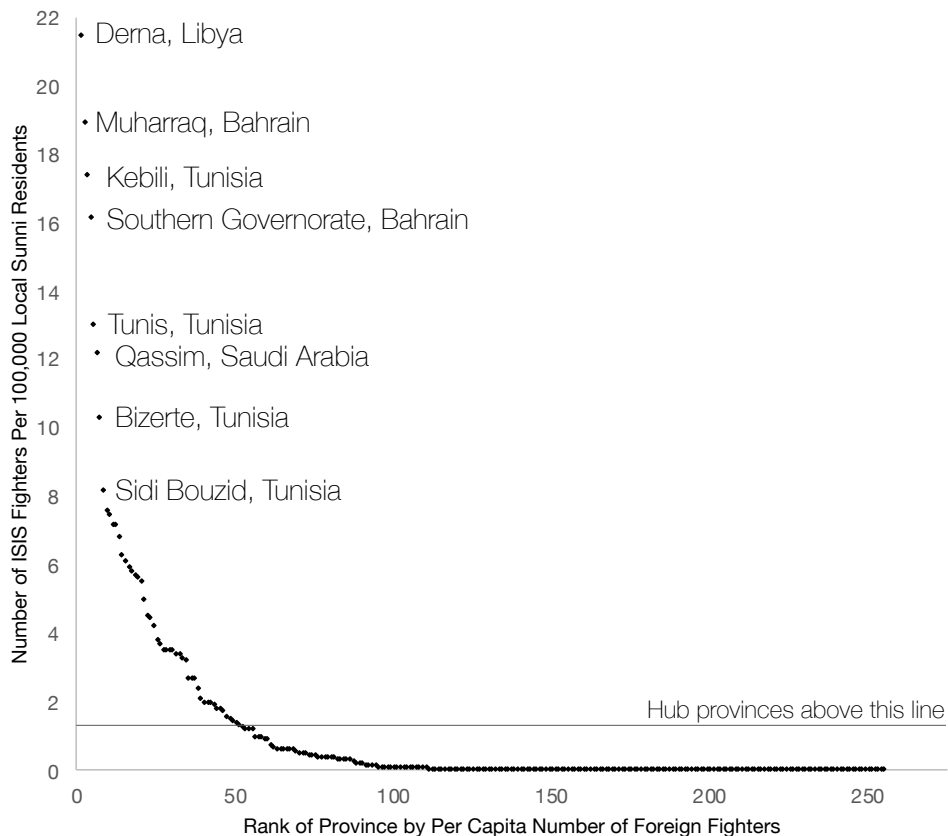
2.3.1. Defining Hubs and their Role in ISIS Recruitment

The majority of ISIS fighters were recruited in “hubs” – a small number of specific towns and neighbourhoods of cities which produced disproportionately large numbers of fighters relative to their population sizes. Understanding these hubs can help explain how and why tens of thousands of people joined ISIS. Hubs increased the number of reasons and opportunities for someone to join a group and reduced the perceived costs associated with joining. The perceived benefits of joining in a hub might go beyond individual-level explanations and include group benefits. Meanwhile, perceived costs might be lower as well – with hubs facilitating a feeling of safety in numbers and helping ease the transit of fighters to ISIS by reducing the material costs and the interpersonal connections necessary to plan, fund, and execute the trip.

What are recruitment hubs? In effect, hubs are places where the per capita rate of recruitment (i.e., foreign fighters, rebel soldiers) is at least double the average rate for a more widely defined region. In this dissertation, ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs were provinces within countries that had at least double the overall per capita rate of recruitment in the Arabic-speaking region. For example, Chapter Four will show that the Arabic-speaking world had an average rate of recruitment of 0.86 ISIS foreign fighters per 100,000 residents per province. So, a “hub,” in this case, would be any province with a per capita rate of recruitment of 1.72 persons per 100,000. Of the 255 provinces in the Arabic-speaking world, 45 are classified as “hubs.”

In keeping with the discussion at the beginning of this chapter on scale economies, recruitment to a variety of organized, high risk activities, including but not limited to foreign fighting, should exhibit a power law-like distribution curve when comparing the rates of recruitment with the places where recruitment is taking place. The graph in Figure 2.1 shows an example of the distribution of the per capita rate of fighter recruitment in provinces across Arabic-speaking world. Here the power law-like distribution of fighters shows how a small number of places had high rates of recruits while many places had little or no recruitment of fighters.

Figure 2.1 ISIS Foreign Fighters by Province per Provincial Population



Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; compiled by author

Part of why geographic concentrations grow at such a scale is because of social networks. People, given their social nature, do not make choices according to everything that is possible; they make choices according to what they believe is available to them, and others around them model what is possible. Some research on the effect of social networks on foreign fighter recruitment has argued that fast growing recruitment networks need a “radicalizing agent,” a recruiter responsible for the majority of recruits (i.e., Reinares et al., 2017; Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2017). Similarly, other research argues that a “charismatic leader” is critical to large-scale recruitment networks (i.e., Ingram, 2013). These studies, and others that emphasize the importance of social networks in recruitment (i.e., Sageman, 2004), would conclude that geographic concentrations of fighters form due to the presence of effective recruiters. In some cases in the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization, this argument appears convincing. In Muharraq, Bahrain, one of the hubs with the highest per capita rates of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment in the Arabic-speaking world, senior ISIS ideologue, Turki al-Binali, was a crucial recruiter. Two-thirds of the fighters from Muharraq list al-Binali as their reference for joining, with several more listing his cousin. However, as later chapters will explain, this explanation does not fit the variation of hubs forming in Tunisia. Some senior recruitment officials did come from hubs. Kamal Zarrouk, for example, was a senior Salafi-Jihadi figure who grew up in in the Tunis neighbourhood of Jebel Ahmar (Nadia, July 1, 2019). Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, another senior figure, was born in Menzel Bourguiba, another recruitment hub (Zelin, 2020). But recruitment hubs in Tunisia were far more

widespread than these localities (Rosenblatt, 2016), at least in part because senior recruiters were able to travel freely across Tunisia (Zelin, 2020; Sayah, June 8, 2019).

Della Porta's relational framework argues that we should look beyond the description of human networks and develop an actor-agnostic "relational" framework to understand the "complex and contingent" interactions involved in someone as they "radicalize" (i.e., escalate from non-violent contention to violence) (2018, p. 462). Della Porta's relational framework does not just include human interactions – such as those between recruiter and recruit, or charismatic terrorist leader and potential followers. Instead, della Porta argues that a shift towards recruitment or radicalization occurs during interactions with the state (i.e., police encounters), competition between members of similar groups or intragroup cliques, and perceptions of political opportunity. These factors and more are placed in a three-part framework that considers how the micro (individual motivations), meso (interpersonal networks and group dynamics), and context (macro) all interact.

This dissertation follows della Porta's relational approach to argue that network effects are an important but not sole defining reason for hubs. The place they form matters as well. Some research has focused on why place matters too. One volume edited by Varvelli (2016) included chapters on recruitment hubs – called "Jihadist Hotbeds" – in Europe, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. Yet this work lacks a theoretical basis for understanding *why* hubs matter, or what they have in common with one another. To build a theory of recruitment hubs, Malthaner, Lindekilde, and others created a typology of hub-like settings, which they call "milieus." These are the physical

and virtual socio-spatial environments where recruitment takes place (Malthaner and Waldmann, 2014; Malthaner, 2015; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019). Hjelt has conducted advanced empirical and theoretical work on hubs, focusing on where they emerge in the Danish second city of Aarhus (2020). However, these studies focus on European recruitment hubs among mainly immigrant minority Muslim communities, factors which may undermine their generalizability to Muslim majority countries. Still, their approach is valuable in that they import theoretical insights on why hubs matter from the field of criminology, which has a longer history of connecting neighbourhood-level characteristics (i.e., income, educational attainment, and employment levels) with an outcome variable of interest. In criminology, that outcome is often crime rate. For example, Raudenbush and Sampson (1999) have emphasized the importance of neighbourhoods as a distinct political entity which must be studied through a set of methods called “ecometrics.” This dissertation does not employ these advanced research techniques, including community surveys, network analyses of community organizations, police records, or video recorded observations. It will be up to future research to employ advanced econometric methods to understand how people are exposed to certain risk factors in their neighbourhood, including not just criminal behaviour, but also, as this dissertation emphasizes, militant group recruitment.

It is possible that the proliferation of encrypted communications technologies might reduce the salience of recruitment hubs, which rely on in-person connections to form. The rise of social media has raised concerns about web-based technologies being used to recruit foreign fighters (i.e., Weimann, 2016; Kardaş and Özdemir, 2017). In-

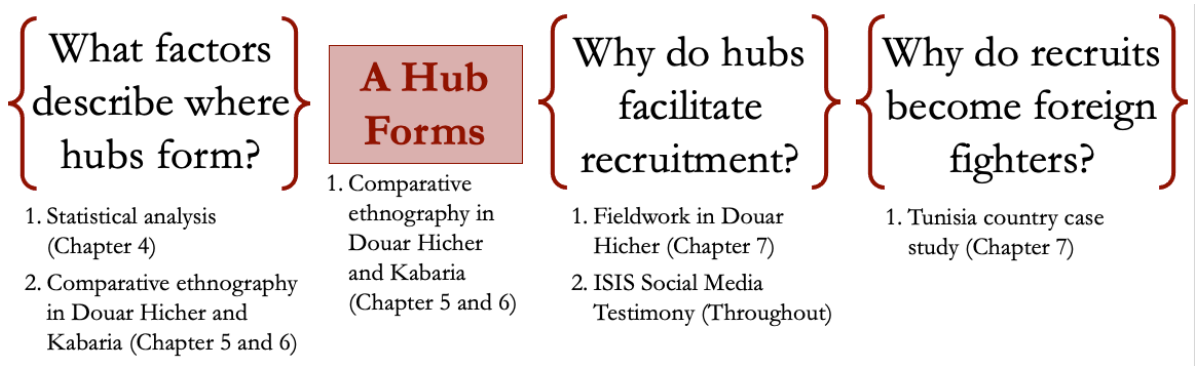
depth research on the use of these technologies has found a range of platforms being used innovatively to make and sustain contact with potential recruits (Singer and Brooking, 2018; Stern and Berger, 2015). Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, ask.fm, and encrypted messaging apps like Signal, WhatsApp and Telegram “provide horizontal communication that is user-generated, interactive, instantaneous, highly personalized, and easily mobile” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015, p. 969). Some might argue that the proliferation of these technologies should reduce the number of hubs as recruiters start to value secrecy over efficiency in recruitment (Shapiro, 2013). But those who have studied online and offline dimensions of recruitment emphasize the two cannot be artificially separated in the process of someone’s recruitment – they are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. A potential recruit does not have an online and offline experience, they have an “onlife” experience: their in-person recruitment is made more profound by their ability to view material online and interact with like-minded individuals around the world, and vice-versa (Floridi, 2015).

2.3.2. Situating Hubs in the Recruitment Process

In the recruitment process, hubs act as a moderating variable situated between the pre-existing structural conditions that predict where militancy emerges and the outcome of joining a foreign insurgency. Certain factors describe where hubs form (see the left-hand side of Figure 2.2 below). Then, once a hub forms, it is the interaction of people who live in these hubs that sets in motion recruitment at faster rates than before. Hubs are the most efficient sites for foreign fighter recruitment, and I argue the way

foreign fighters are recruited from hubs is different from how they are recruited from non-hubs. A hub forms when a group starts to adopt core governing functions from the state, mainly protection, cultural production, and managing local commerce. Hubs succeed because potential joiners have more reasons to join, more opportunities to do so, and are more effectively persuaded to join by recruiters. These reasons relate to the economies of scale mentioned at the beginning of this chapter – the more a hub grew, the easier it was to recruit each additional member. Figure 2.2 shows how hubs fit into the process of foreign fighter recruitment, diagrammatically outlining the structure of the argument in this dissertation.

Figure 2.2 How Hubs Fit in the Recruitment Process



Source: Compiled by author

Chapters Four, Five, and Six investigate the left half of the diagram. They focus on the factors that many hubs share in common – where a hub forms, and also how a hub forms. Chapter Seven crosses to the right half of the diagram in Figure 2.2 to describe what happens after a hub forms. Chapter Seven has two parts: first, how recruitment works in a hub, and second, how recruitment eventually took place for foreign fighting. It concludes that, rather than determinative from structural conditions,

foreign fighting emerges from a sequence of situational factors - choices made by a small number of people at crucial junctures where several alternative futures were also possible (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). These situational factors were crucial to determining when hubs might form for foreign fighting, and when they might form for other high risk organized activity, like domestic insurgency, protests, or riots.

CHAPTER 3 | DATA AND METHODS

Data Provenance and Research Methods

The state of Sheikh Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab arose only by jihad. The state of the Taliban in Afghanistan arose only by jihad. The Islamic state in Chechnya arose only by jihad. It is true that these attempts were not perfect and did not fill the full role required, but incremental progress is a known universal principle. Yesterday, we did not dream of a state; today we established states and they fall. Tomorrow, Allah willing, a state will arise and will not fall.

- Abu Abdallah al-Sa'di, *Voice of Jihad* (Issue #9), January 2004

Introduction

This dissertation combines statistical analysis with in-depth ethnographic fieldwork to understand how hubs of foreign fighter recruitment form, why they form in certain places and not others, how recruitment works in hubs, and why they form for foreign fighting in particular. This chapter focuses on three different methods used in this dissertation to investigate those questions.

Part one (Section 3.1) describes the statistical analysis in this dissertation based on two original datasets used to understand subnational variation in ISIS foreign fighter recruitment. The first dataset was created by ISIS, which catalogued nearly 3,500 foreign fighters who joined the group between 2013 and 2014. I translated, deduplicated, and coded this database, which includes biographical details about the foreign fighters such as their home origins, education levels, and professional histories. I compiled the second dataset from subnationally representative survey data collected from the 17 countries studied in this dissertation. These surveys include data on variations within regions that allow tests for how population size, proportion of youth,

relative changes in wealth or unemployment, and other factors relate to foreign fighter recruitment hubs forming.

Part two (Section 3.2) of this chapter describes the qualitative research component of this study, which compares two neighbourhoods in the suburbs of Tunis, Tunisia that share as many characteristics as possible but vary on the rate of foreign fighters. Whereas one neighbourhood had many residents reach Syria, the other had far fewer. The question this section asks is what conditions led to foreign fighters joining ISIS in one place and not another despite their similarities. I also describe how I selected these two particular neighbourhoods and my approach for conducting interviews and observations there.

Part three (Section 3.3) describes the secondary sources that I reviewed to supplement my research. This includes, but is not limited to, material produced by ISIS fighters on social media. In particular, it describes certain types of published, but now difficult to find, material posted online by ISIS fighters. It includes personal testimonies of how foreign fighters reached Syria from their home countries, propaganda, and eulogies with biographical material written about dead fighters by their comrades. Social media material helped me contextualize how fighters were recruited and how they joined ISIS in Syria.

3.1 Quantitative Research – Data and Methods

The purpose of the statistical analysis in this dissertation is twofold: first, to understand the effect of hubs on recruitment, and second, to identify what

characteristics correlate to regions of the Arabic-speaking world that experienced high rates of ISIS foreign fighters. Section 3.1 includes three parts: part one (3.1.1) describes the provenance of the ISIS foreign fighter registration data this paper uses to identify hubs of recruitment in provinces across the Arabic-speaking world. It also includes an explanation for how I de-duplicated, translated, and coded the data for analysis. The second part (3.1.2) describes how I collected and harmonized subnationally representative census data on 255 provinces in 17 Arabic-speaking countries. Part three (3.1.3) describes the methods I used to conduct the quantitative analysis. The methods described in this section mainly apply to Chapter Four of the dissertation, which compares ISIS fighters' backgrounds to the conditions of the places where they were recruited and identifies the characteristics that distinguish provinces that became ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs across the Arabic-speaking world.

3.1.1 ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Data

The ISIS administrative files I use in this study were smuggled out of Raqqa in 2016 on a USB drive by a defecting ISIS fighter from a special branch of ISIS's internal security service. The fighter met with several journalists and intelligence services, delivering these files in exchange for immunity from prosecution (Omar et al., 2016). The files contained registration forms of approximately 3,500 foreign fighter forms who were recorded joining ISIS from approximately mid-2013 to mid-2014. The registration forms were not well organised. But once I translated, coded, and de-duplicated them, I found they included personal detail that ISIS officials recorded about their foreign fighters who

entered ISIS territory in Syria from Turkey. In the forms, new joiners were asked to disclose their birthdays, names, home addresses, and other personal details. For a more complete description of what is included in these forms and for summary statistics about their distribution across the entire sample, please see previous studies using these data (Rosenblatt, 2016; Dodwell et al., 2016). A translated list of questions in the form is available in Appendix B and Appendix C.

This study coded two types of data from these registration forms. The first is geographical data. Fighters listed their “address and place of residence” in the registration forms. This data will be used to determine subnational variation in the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization. In the Arabic-speaking world, approximately 96 percent of fighters’ origins could be geo-located to the province level in their country of origin. This chapter will show there was minimal response bias in missing data (i.e., Figure 3.3 and Table 3.1 later in this chapter).

Although some fighters included more detailed geographic origins, the number and nature of their responses were not sufficient to be reliably located to a more detailed level of geographic specificity. Many fighters listed more detailed origins in their forms, but there are several challenges regarding coding those origins at a more specific level of geography. For example, the names of cities in the Arabic-speaking world are often also the names of provinces (e.g., Alexandria, Egypt; Riyadh, Saudi Arabia). When a fighter lists “Alexandria” as their origin, it is not possible to differentiate whether that fighter is referring to the city or the province. If a coding regime assumed in these cases the fighter meant the city when they may have been referring to the province, then the

results would have a strong urban bias. If a coding regime discarded these fighters due to this unresolved conflict, then there may be a rural bias. To safely include as many fighters as possible in this analysis, I code the registration forms to measure subnational variation in the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization at the province level.

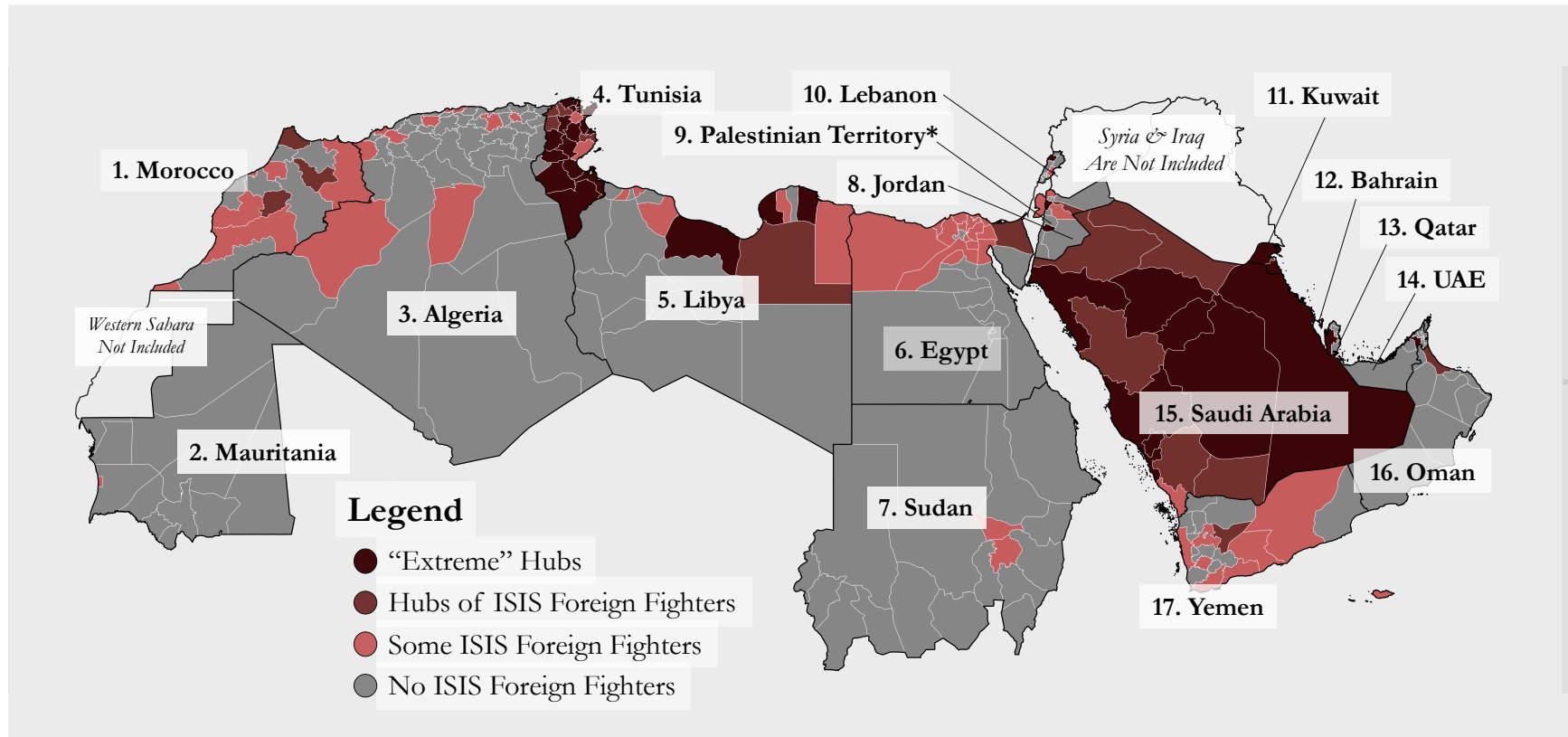
The second type of data I coded in these forms is biographical data. The ISIS foreign fighter registration form included a fighters' real name and *kunīa* (a *nom de guerre* that all fighters were expected to provide). To anonymize the dataset for ethical considerations, fighter names and *kunīas* were replaced by a randomly selected ID number (see Appendix N for ethical considerations). The forms also included key biographical characteristics analysed in this study: date of birth (used to calculate a fighters' age when they joined), educational attainment, previous profession, marital status, travel history, level of religious training, and previous combat experience.

Most biographical data was taken as-is (i.e., a fighter was unemployed or not; was under 30 years old or not). One transformation made from these data was to calculate a fighters' socioeconomic score. This score normalizes answers to the following questions in order to generate a composite score that roughly approximates a fighters' overall socioeconomic status (SES): marital status, educational history, professional history, and travel history. The assumption with this SES score is that people who are married with children, who have advanced education, who have well-paying jobs, and who have travelled extensively abroad are better off than the opposite. The scores of previous professions were estimated from professional income scores generated by the International Labor Office International Standard Classification of

Occupations 2008 (ISCO–08) (2013). The purpose of this composite score was to gain greater insight into the relationship between a fighters' overall SES and their propensity to join ISIS. It was also to avoid the possibility of being misled from studying each characteristic independently. For example, a young fighter from a wealthy family in Saudi Arabia might join ISIS while still an unmarried university student. That fighter might not be married or yet have a well-paying profession, but their socioeconomic status score would be boosted by their educational score and, presumably, their travel history.

My dissertation focuses on ISIS foreign fighters in the 17 countries of the Arabic-speaking world, broken down into 255 provinces. Within this region, nearly half of the 255 provinces did not have any foreign fighters, according to the data in the registration forms. Figure 3.1 on the next page shows the distribution of ISIS foreign fighters by province in the Arabic-speaking world. There are 111 provinces with at least one fighter, and 45 provinces that are hubs because they had at least two times the expected per capita rate of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment. Finally, Figure 3.1 also highlights 37 provinces that were “extreme” hubs – hubs with three times the expected per capita rate of fighters per province (“extreme” hubs are tested in the sensitivity analysis in Appendix H). For a tabular breakdown of fighters per province, please see Appendix D.

Figure 3.1 Map of Provinces Analysed in 17 Arabic-Speaking Countries



NOTE: Hubs of ISIS foreign fighters had twice the average rate of ISIS foreign fighters in the 17 countries above. The average rate was 0.86 persons per 100,000 local national Sunni Muslim residents. Hubs had 1.72 persons per 100,000 local residents, and “extreme” hubs had three times the average rate (2.58 persons per 100,000).

NOTE: “Some ISIS foreign fighters” are provinces with at least one fighter.

* - Palestinian territories include Gaza and the West Bank. Israel is not included.

Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; shapefiles from the Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM, 2018); compiled by author

Limitations to Generalizability

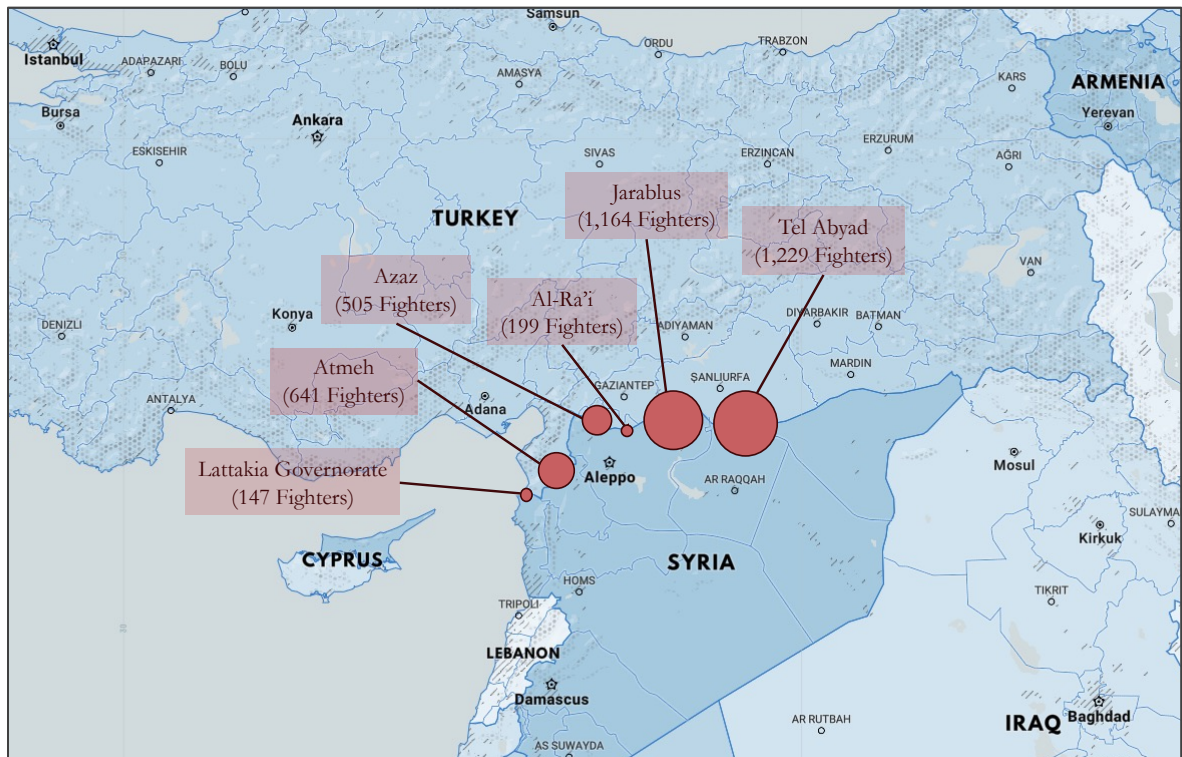
Although these data represent some of the most detailed semi-publicly available material on foreign fighter flows to any insurgency in the Middle East, they have five limitations that should be considered. These are summarized below, along with their impact on the conclusions of this dissertation.

First, the data only include joiners from mid-2013 to mid-2014. By 2015, it was harder to join ISIS: most countries had designated ISIS a terrorist organisation, Turkey policed its border more carefully, and ISIS started facing steeper military challenges (Witte et al., 2016). As Humphreys and Weinstein found in their study of the conflict in Sierra Leone, the motivations of participants to a single insurgency may change over time in same conflict (2008). This likely means the composition of ISIS' foreign fighters after 2015 differed from those who joined in its first two years of its existence. As a result, there are limits in the extent to which claims about foreign fighter flows from 2013-14 can be generalized to the overall foreign fighter mobilization to ISIS. Nevertheless, the period from mid-2013 to mid-2014 covers part of the peak of foreign fighter mobilizations to ISIS. It also covers the period of joining when it was easiest to do so, which means the networks of joiners likely represented those that were most naturally forming. As al-Baghdadi predicted, more who wanted to join ISIS during this time had the opportunity to do so.

Second, the data only include fighters who joined ISIS via the Turkish-Syrian border. They do not include fighters, for example, who crossed into Syria via its borders with Jordan, Lebanon, or Iraq. They also do not capture those who joined ISIS from

within Syria, such as foreign fighters who defected from another militant group already fighting in Syria. Nevertheless, the data includes all the main Turkey-Syrian border crossings that a fighter might prefer to join ISIS. The map in Figure 3.2 shows the crossings of most of the fighters recorded in the registration forms.

Figure 3.2 Main Turkey-Syria Border Crossings for ISIS Foreign Fighters



Source: Dodwell et al., 2016; Map Style: Slaughter, 2018

Despite these limitations, Turkey was the most popular country for fighters to transit through on their way to Syria. This is because border crossings elsewhere were far less desirable: joining ISIS via Iraq would have involved added personal risk via travel through territory controlled by Kurdish or hostile state authorities. The eastern part of the Turkish-Syrian border was controlled by Syrian Kurdish forces, and therefore not passable for ISIS recruits. The Jordanian border was the most tightly patrolled, and the

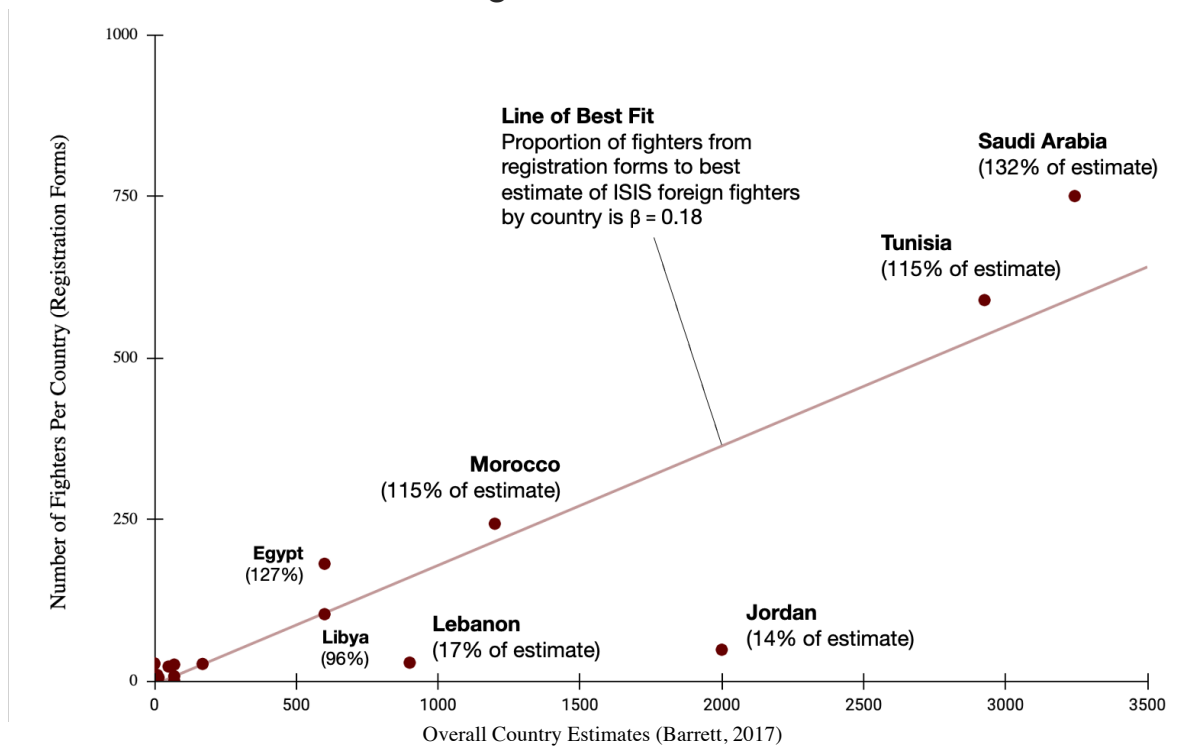
Lebanese international airport was controlled by Hezbollah, an Iran-backed Shia militia that would deter or detain foreign fighters attempting to join insurgents they opposed in Syria (Daragahi and Rafei, 2008). Additionally, ISIS recruiters actively encouraged travel through Turkey, such as through published guidebooks accessible online (Hijrah, 2015). For these reasons, Turkey was the *de facto* crossing route for ISIS foreign fighters. One joiner's online post revealed how Turkey was the default entry point for foreign fighters to reach Syria: "I didn't know the route to take...and didn't know anything about my journey...all that I knew is that I should fly to the Istanbul airport, from there fly to one of the villages near the Turkish-Syrian borders, and then a car would take me from there to enter Syria" (al-'Ubaydi, 2014, p. 12).

These first two limitations concern the potential bias of the registration forms sample compared to the overall mobilization of ISIS foreign fighters. This bias can be tested by comparing the registration forms sample with total estimates of ISIS foreign fighters by country compiled and used by researchers (e.g., Barrett, 2017). If certain countries were over- or under-represented in the registration data relative to overall estimates, that might indicate potential limitations of the generalizability of the claims we can make about where ISIS foreign fighters came from. For example, if Egyptian fighters did not join ISIS until after 2015, then there would be fewer Egyptian fighters than expected in the registration forms data. Or, if most fighters from Jordan did not join ISIS via the Turkey-Syria border, then there would be fewer Jordanian fighters as well.

Figure 3.3 below shows that registration forms data are a fairly consistent subset of the best country-level estimates available (from Barrett, 2017; based on official and

unofficial sources). The line in the graph below is at a slope of $\beta = 0.18$, which shows that the ISIS registration forms data represents approximately 18 percent of the total estimates of a country's foreign fighters. The percentages in parenthesis next to each labelled country on the graph signify the proportion of the ISIS administrative sample relative to the predicted sample. For example, the Tunisian sample is 115 percent, or 15 percent greater than the predicted subset.

Figure 3.3 ISIS Registration Form Sample Compared with Overall Fighter Estimates



Seven countries are labelled in Figure 3.3, and the remaining 10 countries are clustered near the intersection of the x and y axis. Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; Barrett, 2017; compiled by author.

Of the 17 countries shown above, only two are substantially under-estimated: Lebanon is 17 percent of the estimated amount and Jordan is 14 percent. That means, for example, the best overall estimates report that approximately 900 fighters joined ISIS from Lebanon. The predicted amount in the ISIS forms from this overall estimate is $\beta =$

0.18, or 18 percent, which means there should be 162 fighters from Lebanon in the registration forms data. But there are only 28 ISIS fighters from Lebanon in the registration forms, which is 17 percent of the estimated amount (17 percent of 162 is 28).

The likely reason Lebanon and Jordan are under-estimated is because they entered Syria through their own border, rather than through Turkey. These countries are included but controlled for in the statistical analysis to account for whatever bias might exist among the fighters who came from Lebanon and Jordan (i.e., they were wealthy enough to fly to Turkey to enter Syria rather than cross the country's land border).

Saudi Arabia is the country that my data most over-estimates relative to its predicted sample. It is 132 percent of the expected amount. The reason for this is less clear than for Lebanon and Jordan: there could be some factor about Saudi fighters that makes them more likely to have registered with ISIS officials. It could be that the government of Saudi Arabia under-reported the total number of fighters from their country in the published estimates. It could also be that more Saudi fighters joined ISIS in the early years of the war rather than later. I intend to use the Saudi data, but given that their inclusion may skew my results, I intend to control for any outsized influence the Saudi sample may have on my results in robustness checks (Appendix I).

It is hard to predict how accurate the estimates are from the Barrett (2017) study (results shown in Appendix A). Certain governments may have political motivations to over- or under-estimate the number of ISIS fighters in their home countries for various reasons. For example, a country might over-estimate their fighter number to attract

global counter-terrorism funding. While another country might under-estimate it to project an image that transnational jihadism was a limited and manageable problem. It is hard to predict the accuracy of overall country estimates, but this data are the best available and have been used in other studies (i.e., Benmelech and Klor, 2018).

A third limitation is that the data consist entirely of self-reported information provided by the foreign fighters to ISIS officials. While this may introduce some bias, the crucial questions that I analyse are difficult to falsify, and ISIS recruits would have less reason to lie about them. Because most fighters are required to list a reference, ISIS officials could presumably double-check the accuracy of new joiners' biographical information when they registered. While all data provided and recorded by insurgents is, at some level, untrustworthy, I think the fidelity of the particular data examined here (i.e., marital status, professional history) is not a systemic issue.

Fourth, there are concerns that missing data will skew the results, for example fighters from a certain country who did not answer questions analysed in this study, or who did not include information about their subnational origins (i.e., a fighter from Tunisia says he is from Tunisia but not where in Tunisia he is from). One of the reasons I focused on the Arabic-speaking world is that it had fewer missing questions than the overall, global sample. This is likely because the fighters were joining from Arabic-speaking countries, and the ISIS administrators filling out the forms were mainly Arabic-speaking.⁵ As Table 3.1 shows, fighters from Arabic-speaking countries answered 93 percent of all

⁵ It is evident from a careful review of the forms that ISIS officials were filling out the forms, rather than the fighters filling them out themselves. This is mainly because there were consistent spelling mistakes of non-Arabic place names – Strasbourg, for example, was misspelled in a consistent way in multiple forms. This suggests that a single enumerator, likely an official, was filling out forms for multiple fighters.

the questions asked in their registration forms, and 96 percent listed information about their home origins that could be geo-referenced at a province level. That was 2 percent more than the overall sample for all questions answered, and 6 percent more than the overall sample for information about subnational origins (see Table 3.1). The high response rate of Arabic-speaking fighters and the fact that non-respondents were fairly well dispersed across all countries should reduce concerns about missing data.

Table 3.1 Proportion of Missing Questions in ISIS Registration Forms by Region of Fighter Origin

Country of Residence	Total Number of Fighters in Country	Total Number of Reg. Fighters with Subnational Data	Total Questions Asked (#)	Percent of Questions Answered (%)
Saudi Arabia	750	727	11250	93%
Tunisia	589	578	8835	93%
Morocco	244	233	3645	92%
Egypt	180	162	2715	90%
Libya	103	103	1545	93%
Jordan	48	46	720	93%
Lebanon	28	28	420	92%
Bahrain	27	27	405	94%
Algeria	26	23	390	92%
Yemen	26	21	390	90%
Kuwait	25	25	375	91%
Palestine	20	19	300	92%
Remaining Countries	24	19	360	94%
Subtotal: Arabic-speaking world	2090	2011	31050	93%
Total: all forms	3464	3134	51960	91%

NOTE: For the list of questions asked in the registration forms, please see Appendix B and C. ISIS fighters from Iraq and Syria are excluded as they are not considered “foreign” fighters. These countries were combined in the “Remaining Countries” row but excluded for brevity because they had fewer than 10 fighters: Somalia, Mauritania, UAE, Qatar, Sudan, Oman.

A fifth limitation is the registration forms are unable to speak to more detailed geographies. I geolocated foreign fighters to province, each country’s largest subnational administrative units. The findings presented here make clear that

subnational variation has utility compared to country level studies, a result echoed in the broader conflict literature (e.g., by Sambanis, 2004). However, the province-level focus in this study is still quite general. The average population of the 255 provinces studied in this dissertation is 1.1 million people. That is a far more fine-grained approach than studying countries in the Arabic-speaking world, which have an average population of 19.5 million people and contain regions that vary tremendously in terms of their demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the problem with the quantitative analysis in this dissertation is that it studies socioeconomic indicators of regions that themselves are not the sites of recruitment – recruitment takes place in small city neighbourhoods and parts of more rural towns, not randomly scattered across provinces of more than one million people. The geographic limitations of this study are the reason why the qualitative research conducted in this dissertation is crucial: it could check the assumptions of statistical research at such a large scale.

The data used in this study are imperfect. As a result, I rely on them for descriptive, rather than causal, analysis. Nevertheless, these data still represent the largest ever cache of primary source information on individual foreign fighters. They are approximately five times larger than the two largest available datasets on foreign fighters. The first, the leaked files of detainees at the U.S. detention centre in Guantanamo Bay (mainly foreign fighters detained in Afghanistan and Yemen), included approximately 765 fighters (Guantanamo Files, 2011). The second, a database of similarly structured fighter registration forms of those who joined Al Qaeda in Iraq found in 2006, totalled 606 fighters (Fishman and Felter, 2007).

3.1.2 Subnationally Representative Census Data from the Arabic-Speaking World

Explanatory variables on the socioeconomic characteristics of provinces in the Arabic-speaking world were collected from subnationally representative census data recorded by each of the 17 countries studied wherever possible. A dataset on subnational socioeconomic indicators across the Arabic-speaking world was not available from other sources (i.e., the World Bank), so I compiled it manually for this dissertation. This dataset could be used as explanatory variables to test other questions that pertain to subnational variation (i.e., where protests or riots emerge, where political violence occurs, where certain types of political parties have hubs of support, where acts of state repression are more likely). To collect these data, I selected a census from each country taken as close as possible to the years 2013-14, when most fighters in the ISIS registration forms arrived in Syria. My geographic unit for these data was the province. To view the sources I used, the variables collected, and the years from which the subnationally representative samples were drawn, see Appendix E, F, and G.

There were highly variable levels of depth, accessibility, and quality for subnationally representative data collected in the 17 Arabic-speaking countries studied in this chapter. While national statistics websites were comprehensive and straightforward in countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Tunisia, and in the Palestinian Territories, they were difficult to find and quite limited in scope in Sudan, Mauritania, and Algeria among others. In addition to these countries, many do not record their census data in an accessible, tabular format. Because data were not available in tabular form,

it required hours of transcription by hand, raising the potential for human error. Further, my study focuses only on local national populations, so I could not use some subnationally representative data if it did not further differentiate between nationals and non-nationals. Therefore, data choices were further constrained whenever countries with large proportions of foreign nationals, such as the United Arab Emirates or Qatar, did not differentiate their data by nationality. The difficulty finding statistics, and the lack of clear consistency and reliability across datasets, made harmonizing these subnationally-representative data difficult. Trends do clearly emerge between statistics shared by fighters and their provinces of origin (i.e., regarding educational attainment and unemployment rates), which indicates to a certain extent that these data are accurate despite their limits. More important, possibly, is what these statistics left out. I could not test, for example, crime rates, divorce rates, arrest records, illegal migration statistics, or most forms of political or economic exclusion. These factors were crucial parts of the qualitative findings, but I could not test them with any available statistics.

One of the most significant challenges to selecting, cleaning, and coding the data for my predictor variables was that six out of the 17 countries studied had re-adjusted their administrative regions since 2000 (i.e., Lebanon split two of its provinces into four provinces in 2014). Adjusting for these changes meant not being able to utilise data for some regions that would show change over time (i.e., population growth). See Appendix F for data availability by country and topic.

In summary, the data which were eventually chosen and included in this study were selected based on careful review and occasionally difficult trade-offs. Data that

were chosen in this study represented some of the best possible data available in most of the 17 countries studied. The result, albeit imperfect, is an early attempt to develop a comprehensive subnational database of socioeconomic indicators in the Arabic-speaking world.

3.1.3 What is a Hub? Developing a Statistical Definition

To develop a statistical definition for what a hub was, I calculated the per capita rate of ISIS fighters by province. To do so, I took the number of ISIS fighters in each province from the registration forms described in 3.1.1 and indexed them to the population of local national Sunni Muslims in each province. I include ‘Sunni Muslim,’ because nearly all of those who joined ISIS were Sunni Muslims (e.g., as opposed to other religions or sects of Islam that may also reside in these regions). To do this, I needed to estimate the proportion of religious sects residing in each province of the 17 countries in this study and adjust their overall population figures accordingly (for a review of the sources used to do this, please see Appendix G). I use ‘local national’ population figures because some countries in my data have large foreign migrant populations who, with very few exceptions, did not join ISIS and whose inclusion in population statistics might skew the results. These were easier to calculate than subnational variation in religious populations, since many countries with large proportions of foreign nationals did differentiate between national and foreign citizens in their population surveys.

As described in the previous chapter, a “hub” is any measurable geographic unit whose per capita recruitment rate is at least twice the average per capita rate of

recruitment of a wider region in which the area in question is a part. For example, this study examines the per capita rates of ISIS recruitment by provinces of all countries in the Arabic-speaking world. I scope this definition deliberately so that it can apply to different areas and types of research questions. For example, a future study could examine recruitment hubs among neighbourhoods of a single city, or among districts within a single province. The important distinctions are: 1) the geographic area is a measurable unit that is part of a wider region; and 2) that hubs are defined as places with disproportionate rates of recruitment, indexed to population, relative to the wider region as a whole. This is a somewhat arbitrary definition, but this is a theory generating research project, so my preference is to define recruitment hubs in a simply stated form over a more complex *ad-hoc* definition that may be hard to conceptualize and difficult to test in future research projects (King et al., 1994).

In this dissertation, I chose to use a specific definition of a hub to privilege clear explanation, however I acknowledge and include in Appendix H a sensitivity analysis that checks statistical definitions of hubs that are less and more restrictive (1.5 or three times the average recruitment rate) than the one chosen here mainly to test the findings presented in Chapter Four.

3.1.4 Methods of Quantitative Analysis

In Chapter Four, I use the forms described in 3.1.1, the subnationally representative census data described in 3.1.2, and the statistical definition of a hub provided in 3.1.3 to conduct two different statistical tests. The first test is to determine

whether hubs changed the relationship between the biographical profiles of fighters and the conditions in the places where they were recruited. For example, if ISIS fighters from Tunis are young, is that because the population of Tunis is more youthful, because hubs like Tunis tended to be younger, or because there something about hubs like Tunis that made younger people more likely to be recruited? I developed the second test to identify the socioeconomic traits that ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs shared in common in the Arabic-speaking world. The methods of analysis for these two tests are summarized below; they will be explained in greater depth in Chapter Four.

To compare fighter biographical details to the conditions in the places where they were recruited, I transformed province-level data into fighter data and compared rates of certain factors in provinces (i.e., unemployment rates, youth proportions) to the profiles of the fighters (i.e., whether or not that fighter is unemployed; whether or not they are under 30 years old). For a list of the variables tested, see Chapter Four, Section Two. These variables are analysed in three models. The first compares province characteristics with fighter traits, and the second copies the first but adds the presence or absence of hubs as a control. Third and finally, to test whether the relationship between province characteristics and fighter biographical profiles is moderated by the presence of a hub, I introduce hubs as a dichotomous interaction term. If the interaction term is statistically significant, then hubs may moderate the relationships between structural conditions in hubs and the biographies of the fighters recruited in them – meaning, something about recruitment in hubs changes the type of person being recruited.

The second statistical test identifies the characteristics that ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs shared in common. To identify the provinces from which disproportionate rates of ISIS foreign fighters emerged, I compared census data on socioeconomic conditions in provinces across the Arabic-speaking world as explanatory variables with the presence or absence of a hub as the dichotomous dependent variable. Because this test does not rely on fighter traits, it can test a larger number of variables selected from the census data and based on extant theories of recruitment.

For both tests, I use a linear regression technique. Although in both cases my dependent variable is dichotomous – whether a certain fighter has the trait in question or not; whether a province is a recruitment hub or not – research comparing linear and logistic regressions finds that they are almost indistinguishable from each other in most cases except that logistic estimates are harder to interpret. Having used both logistic and linear and found similar results, I show and interpret the linear regressions as these are more intuitive (Hellevik, 2009). I conduct robustness checks in Appendix I and Appendix K that use logistic regression models to compare the results. I also conduct several other robustness checks on the models presented in Chapter Four, including using per capita rates of foreign fighters, rather than the presence or absence of ‘hubs,’ to test whether the factors that describe where hubs form also apply when the dependent variable is count-based rather than dichotomous. This robustness check uses a negative binomial model, which is preferred for over-dispersed count data (i.e., as argued in Dhattiwala and Biggs, 2002).

Additional robustness checks for the statistical analysis in this dissertation include removing countries where the data might be biased by under-representation (e.g., Lebanon and Jordan, as mentioned in 3.1.1), testing for country-level fixed effects (i.e., the potential “Tunisian exception” – since 18 out of 45 (40 percent) of hubs come from regions inside Tunisia, for the potential “Saudi exception” – since 22 percent of hubs come from Saudi Arabia. Finally, I include several controls, including the distance of the province to Syria and the size of the population. These controls limit the extent to which proximity to Syria or high per capita rates from provinces with small population sizes and a few foreign fighters could over-determine the results.

3.2. Qualitative Research – Data and Methods

The second source of original research in this thesis consists of a qualitative comparative case study of two neighbourhoods in Tunis that are as similar as possible yet vary on the rate of foreign fighters who joined ISIS. Whereas 100-200 residents in one neighbourhood joined ISIS, fewer than ten residents joined ISIS from the second area. The purpose of this aspect of my research design is twofold: first, to add qualitative depth to the meaningful correlations I will uncover in my statistical analysis. How do the factors that hubs share in common, as found in the statistical analysis, relate to their becoming hubs?

The second purpose of the fieldwork is to understand how hubs work and whether there are alternative outcomes to foreign fighting. The fact that foreign fighting is so rare suggests that there are many areas that could become hubs of recruitment

for foreign fighters but did not. Ultimately, only a few places were ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs. What explains why these became hubs and other places did not? By focusing on a second neighbourhood with similar characteristics but few foreign fighters, we can begin to understand potential alternatives to foreign fighting. Section 3.2 focuses on how I selected the two case study areas for qualitative research (3.2.1), my methods for conducting research in these locations (3.2.2), and some of the limitations of this approach (3.3.3).

3.2.1 Case Study Selection

My criteria for selecting sites to conduct my comparative case study were that the two sites be as similar as possible but vary on the outcome: the number of foreign fighters. This case selection follows examples of other research designs that rely on qualitative case study research to compare similar regions and understand why they experienced divergent outcomes. These include cross-national historical analyses (i.e., Varese, 2011), as well as subnational case studies of conflict (i.e., Kalyvas, 2006). My goal in the comparative analysis is to examine how the factors explained in the quantitative analysis relate to the outcome of a recruitment hub forming, and whether there are any additional structural factors or local processes that need further explanation. This section describes how I selected the two areas for case study research in this dissertation – two neighbourhoods in the city of Tunis, Tunisia.

Why Tunisia

I chose to conduct the fieldwork component of my dissertation in Tunisia because an estimated 3,000 Tunisians joined ISIS, proportionally one of the highest rates of ISIS foreign fighters in the world. Further, an estimated 27,000 Tunisians were detained trying to reach Syria, making the country a site for many possible recruitment hubs (Zelin, 2018). Subnational analysis of foreign fighter origins has also found some of the world's largest concentrations of foreign fighter recruits in Tunisia (Rosenblatt, 2016). Tunisia is also a reasonably open and democratic country, which made it easier to conduct fieldwork without fear of endangering my own safety or that of my interview subjects. In the many more authoritarian countries across the Middle East and North Africa (i.e., Egypt or Saudi Arabia), this research would have been more dangerous and potentially biased due to oversight by security services. Mitigating the political and security risks of this research might not have been possible elsewhere in the MENA.

Why "Greater Tunis"

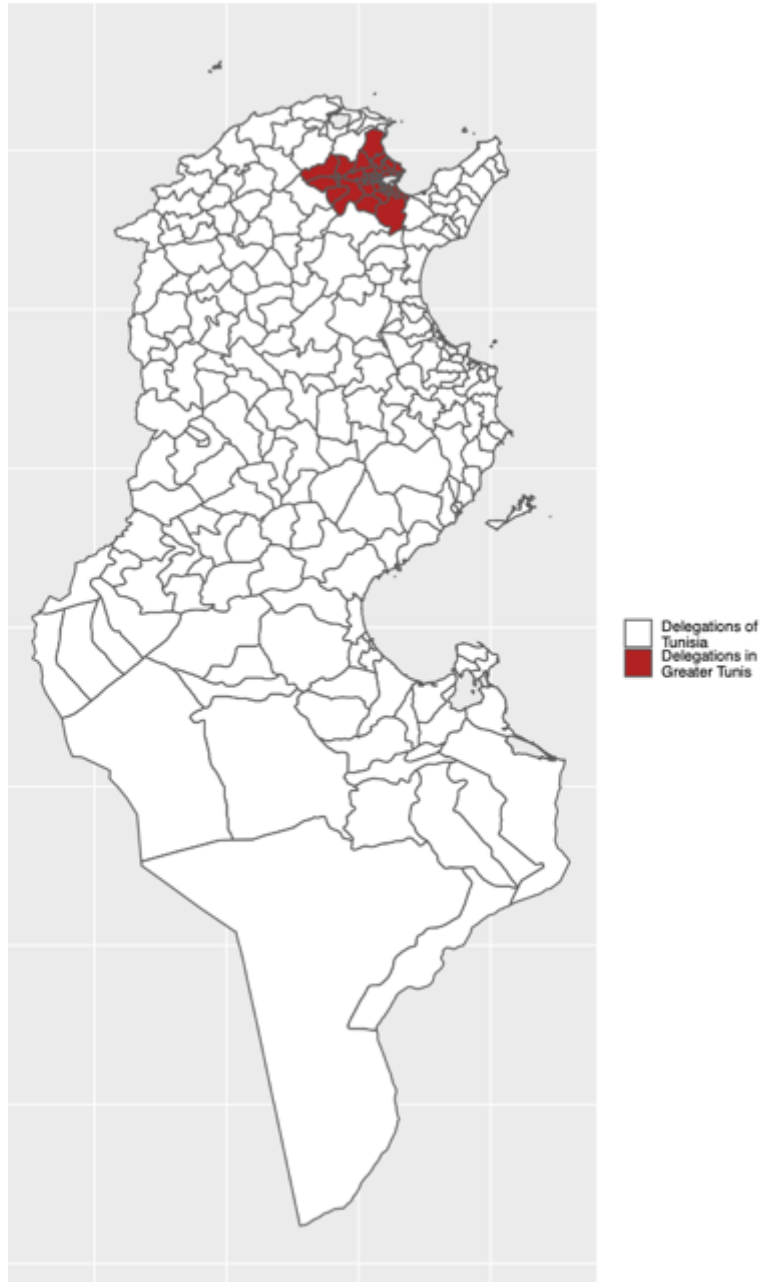
Having picked Tunisia for the fieldwork component of my dissertation, I wanted to first choose a hub of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment where it would be possible to carry out my research plan. Previous research focused on militant recruitment in more rural regions of Tunisia (i.e., Boukhars, 2018; Marcusa, 2018). But quite a lot of foreign fighter recruitment in Tunisia also took place on the outskirts of its major cities. For example, a Tunisian sociologist who studied foreign fighter recruitment in Tunisia described the periphery of its major cities as "black belts." These were neighbourhoods

where thousands of recruits from Tunisia were recruited (Bakr, June 7, 2019). To uncover why these peri-urban neighbourhoods were frequently recruitment hubs, and to add to the limited research on foreign fighter recruitment in urban settings, I selected Tunis as the site for my fieldwork. Selecting Tunis raised another puzzle: how could so much foreign fighter recruitment to ISIS take place in neighbourhoods less than five kilometres from the country capital and seat of government?

Neighbourhoods in Greater Tunis

As a city, Tunis is larger than its administrative borders: it spans four “governorates” - the name used to describe Tunisia’s largest subnational administrative regions (see Figure 3.4 on the next page). This larger version of Tunis, sometimes called “Greater Tunis,” accounts for nearly one-quarter of Tunisia’s entire population (2014 National Census, Tunisian National Institute of Statistics – herein cited INS, 2014). In Greater Tunis, there were many areas that had high rates of foreign fighter recruitment. These areas were quite often overpopulated, poorly planned, working-class neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city (Petré, 2015; Lamloum et al., 2016; Merone and Cavatorta, 2013). By choosing two similar neighbourhoods in the same city within the same country, I am able to discard alternative hypotheses, such as culture, language, or the effectiveness of state institutions.

Figure 3.4 Map of Tunisia and Greater Tunis Delegations



Source: shapefiles from the Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM, 2018); compiled by author

To select the recruitment hub to study out of the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Greater Tunis, I chose Douar Hicher for two reasons: first, because it has a well-known reputation for being a prolific centre for ISIS recruitment, and second, because of the strong personal connections I had among social workers and civil society activists

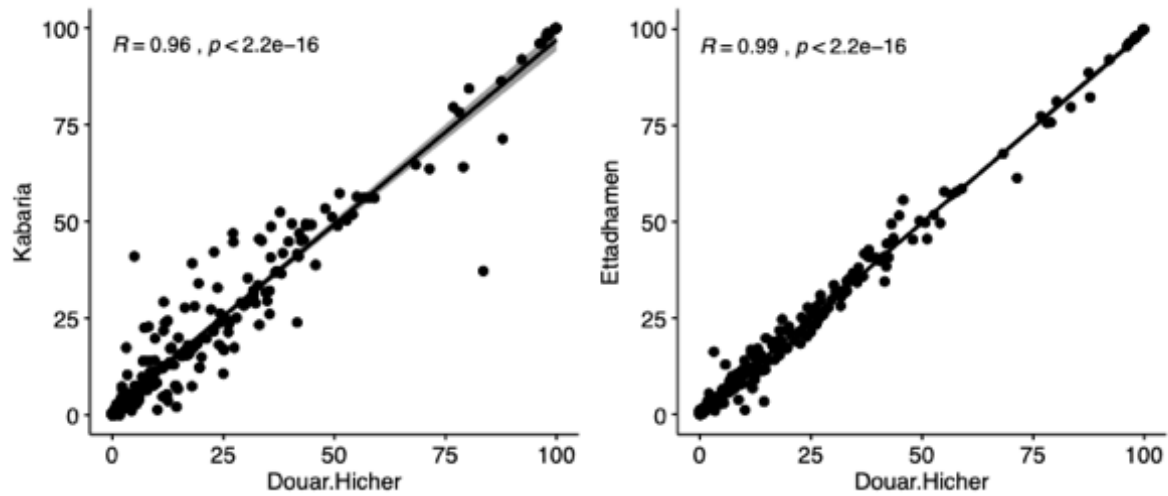
who worked in that specific neighbourhood. As I will describe in more detail in Section 3.2.2, those personal connections were crucial for introducing me to knowledgeable residents and for building trust quickly with friends and family of those who were eventually recruited to fight with ISIS in Syria.

Once I selected Douar Hicher as a “high rate” neighbourhood – the place with a large number of ISIS recruits – my next step was to find a comparison that was as similar as possible to Douar Hicher but where few foreign fighters were recruited. To find that neighbourhood, I had to answer three questions:

1. **Similarity**: how *similar* was the neighbourhood to Douar Hicher?
2. **Few Fighters**: did the neighbourhood have a *confirmable low rate* of residents who went to fight with ISIS in Syria/Iraq?
3. **Access**: Would I be *able to interview residents* there?

To start my search for neighbourhoods that were as similar as possible to Douar Hicher but varied on the rate of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment, I reviewed the data collected during Tunisia’s 2014 census. Focusing on the 49 delegations within the four governorates of Greater Tunis, I conducted a correlation test comparing each delegation with Douar Hicher. In total, my regression analysis relied on 294 variables collected from the census, including population, employment rate, educational attainment rate, marital status, household size, migration patterns, access to utilities, and other statistics (INS, 2014). Figure 3.5 below shows how most relationships between Douar Hicher and other similar neighbourhoods were linear.

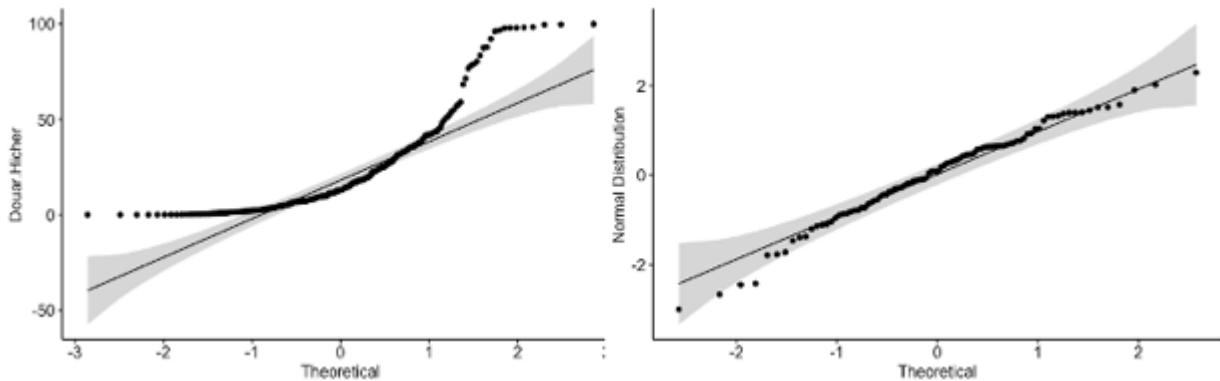
Figure 3.5 Delegations in Greater Tunis Have a Linear Relationship



Source: 2014 National Census, Tunisian National Institute of Statistics; compiled by author

But, as Figure 3.5 below shows, the data on each delegation were not normally distributed. This means we cannot use the most common Pearson method to test for correlations between two delegations in Greater Tunis.

Figure 3.6 Data from Delegations Are Not Normally Distributed



Source: 2014 National Census, Tunisian National Institute of Statistics; compiled by author

Therefore, to conduct an accurate correlation test to find neighbourhoods similar to Douar Hicher, I chose a rank-based correlations test. Although researchers consider

Spearman's rho and Kendall's tau – two rank-based correlations tests – equivalent in most hypothesis testing (Gilpin, 1993; Puth et al., 2015), studies found that Spearman's rho results performed better than Kendall's tau under certain conditions present in this study. First, if there are any ties in the data (Puth et al., 2015), and second, if there is a desire to minimize mean squared error (Xu et al., 2013). In the 2014 census, there are some ties in the data - for example, over 99 percent of households in most neighbourhoods of Greater Tunis have access to potable water and electric lighting. Second, the correlation test is comparing comparisons – how similar is one neighbourhood to Douar Hicher? A correlation test that minimizes mean squared error performs better given these criteria. This is why I used the Spearman rho method of computing correlations, although the results from the Kendall's tau correlation tests were similar. Figure 3.7 shows the correlation formula for Spearman rho:

Figure 3.7 Spearman's Rho Correlation Formula

$$\rho = \frac{\sum (x' - m_{x'}) (y' - m_{y'})}{\sqrt{\sum (x' - m_{x'})^2 \sum (y' - m_{y'})^2}}$$

Where $x' = \text{rank}(x)$ and $y' = \text{rank}(y)$.

Source: Gilpin, 1993

The Spearman's rho correlation test compared each of Greater Tunis's 49 delegations to Douar Hicher using all 294 variables from Tunisia's 2014 national census. This yielded a top ten list of neighbourhoods that were statistically most similar to Douar Hicher in 2014, a year where many Tunisians appear in the ISIS registration forms data. The top ten list of neighbourhoods similar to Douar Hicher is shown below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Delegations Most Similar to Douar Hicher in Greater Tunis

Delegation Name	Correlation Coefficient	S-Statistic
Douar Hicher	1***	
Ettadhamen	0.982***	37805
Sidi Hassine	0.969***	65564
Oued Ellil	0.964***	77096
Mnihla	0.958***	89585
Fouchana	0.957***	91239
Jebel Jalloud	0.955***	97037
Hrairia	0.955***	97154
Sijoumi	0.953***	99996
Mohammedia	0.952***	102456
Kabaria	0.943***	122725

*Note: Robust standard errors in parenthesis. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Intercepts not shown.*

This list is only a first approximation of similarity. To further refine the selection criteria for the comparison to Douar Hicher, I needed to find which of the neighbourhoods above had confirmable low rates of foreign fighters who joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq. This was challenging, since it is harder to prove the absence of foreign fighter recruits rather than the presence of those recruits in a given neighbourhood.

To find which areas in Table 3.2 had a low rate of foreign fighters, I triangulated information from four sources: first, an internal Tunisian government source on foreign fighters; second, an account of Tunisian foreign fighters via their social media posts; third, via field visits and interviews; and fourth, indirectly by observing a discussion during a conference with participants who were well informed about foreign fighter recruitment in Tunis. All four sources are explained below.

First, I reviewed internal Tunisian government documents thanks to a trusted interlocuter. These documents showed the geographic distribution of foreign fighters by delegation in Tunisia. They also showed the distribution of arrests in Tunisia for those charged with terrorism crimes, which gave me a broader picture of militant activity in the first few years after Tunisia's revolution. The source is extremely reliable, but I was only able to view a map, not exact figures. Nevertheless, the map was helpful in showing relative amounts, such as which areas had high or low rates of recruitment. I used this data source to identify other areas which, like Douar Hicher, also had a high rate of foreign fighters.

Table 3.3 Initial Elimination of Case Study Delegations in Greater Tunis to Compare with Douar Hicher

Delegation Name	Correlation Coeff.	S-Statistic	Final Evaluation
Douar Hicher	1***		SELECTED as <u>High</u> Foreign Fighter Neighbourhood
Ettadhamen	0.982***	37805	High Rate of Foreign Fighters
Sidi Hassine	0.969***	65564	High Rate of Foreign Fighters
Oued Ellil	0.964***	77096	Possible Case Study
Mnihla	0.958***	89585	High Rate of Foreign Fighters
Fouchana	0.957***	91239	Possible Case Study
Jebel Jalloud	0.955***	97037	Possible Case Study
Hrairia	0.955***	97154	High Rate of Foreign Fighters.
Sijoumi	0.953***	99996	High Rate of Foreign Fighters.
Mohammedia	0.952***	102456	Possible Case Study
Kabaria	0.943***	122725	Possible Case Study

*Note: Robust standard errors in parenthesis. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Intercepts not shown. Grey text means eliminated from contention as a possible comparison to Douar Hicher.*

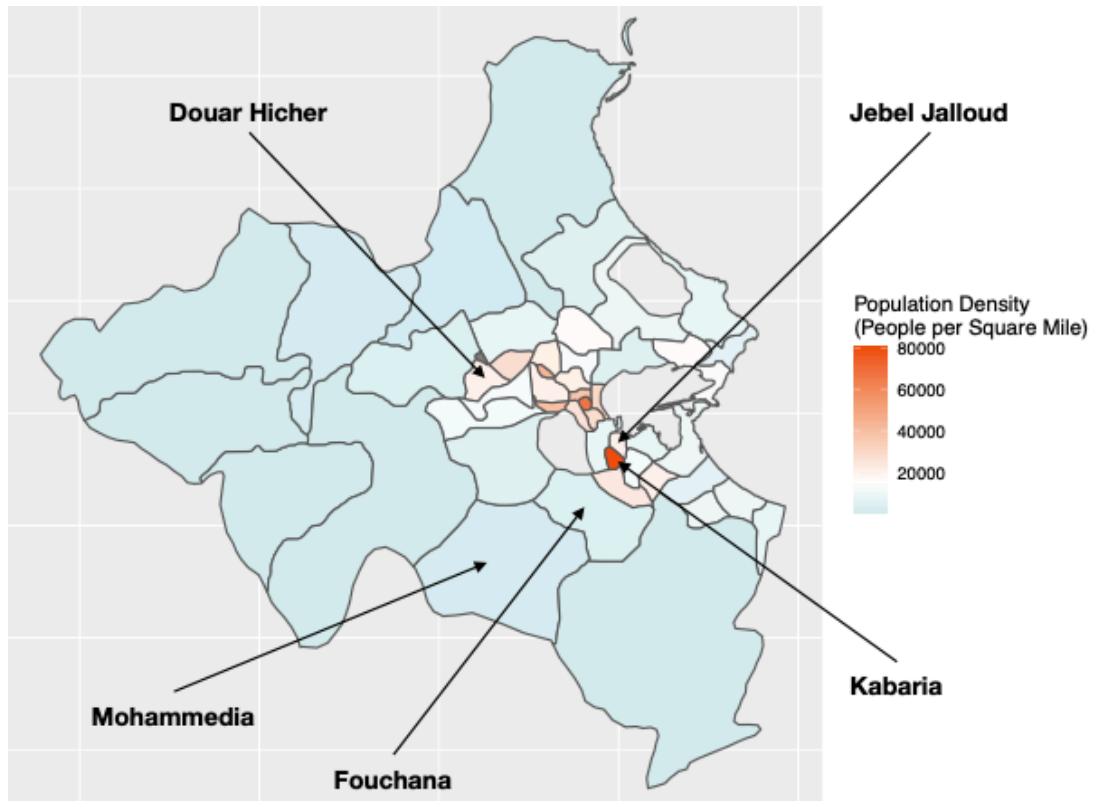
Reviewing this document, I could eliminate five areas from my list of ten neighbourhoods in Table 3.3: Ettadhamen, Sidi Hassine, and Mniha, Hrairia, and Sijoumi. According to the government map, these five areas had large numbers of ISIS foreign fighter recruits and many people detained on terrorism charges. They were likely not good comparisons to Douar Hicher. Note that Table 3.3 repeats Table 3.2, with the five eliminated neighbourhoods shown in light grey. This first triangulation method left five similar neighbourhoods with potentially low rates of foreign fighters: Oued Ellil, Fouchana, Jebel Jalloud, and Mohammedia, and Kabaria.

For the second method of triangulation, I reviewed of all available primary source material on the geographic origins of the foreign fighters from Tunisia. This included my own database of the ISIS foreign fighter registration forms and Aaron Zelin's review of Tunisian foreign fighters who appeared in various forms on social media during the Syrian civil war (Zelin, 2020). Out of these five neighbourhoods, one, Oued Ellil may have been used as a recruitment hub for foreign fighters – a likelihood confirmed by secondary sources (Saidani, 2014). This second measure of triangulation raised doubts on Oued Ellil but did not eliminate the four other neighbourhoods.

The third method of triangulation involved field visits to all four remaining neighbourhoods to talk with civil servants who worked in these areas. Civil servants and local experts I interviewed on background (see Appendix L) confirmed my doubts about Oued Ellil but emphasized that the other four neighbourhoods may not have had large concentrations of foreign fighters who went to Syria and Iraq. That left Fouchana, Mohammedia, Jebel Jalloud, and Kabaria as options for the comparison.

My visit was to Fouchana and Mohammedia, neighbouring delegations on the outskirts of Tunis, made it clear that, in person, these areas did not appear similar enough to Douar Hicher for a valid comparison. Like Douar Hicher, Mohammedia and Fouchana were working-class neighbourhoods that grew on the outskirts of Greater Tunis and were populated mainly by rural-urban migrants. But there were too many differences: Mohammedia was smaller, farther from downtown Tunis, more sparsely populated (see Figure 3.8 below), and did not have the decades-long social history and stigmatization that residents experienced living in Douar Hicher.

Figure 3.8 Population Density of Greater Tunis Delegations



Source: shapefiles from the Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM, 2018); compiled by author

Fouchana was slightly more densely populated than Mohammedia, as it was closer to the city centre, but it was still much more dispersed than Douar Hicher. Also,

Fouchana residents were gainfully employed in nearby factories, while the population of Douar Hicher was far larger than the number of factory jobs which initially attracted residents to the area. Fouchana and Mohammedia were growing into Greater Tunis, while Douar Hicher was long a part of it. The field visit to Fouchana and Mohammedia eliminated them as the appropriate comparative case studies for Douar Hicher. These areas may not have had high rates of foreign fighters, but they did not pass the similarity test once I visited them in person.

This left two neighbourhoods that appeared to be similar to Douar Hicher and also had low rates of recruitment – Kabaria and Jebel Jalloud. I preferred Kabaria first because it was more comparable in size to Douar Hicher. There were 84,090 people in Douar Hicher, 86,000 people in Kabaria, and 23,600 people in Jebel Jalloud (INS, 2014). Access was a second reason I selected Kabaria over Jebel Jalloud as the comparative neighbourhood. I needed to have as much access to interview residents in my comparison case as I had secured in Douar Hicher. Yet access in both neighbourhoods proved much harder than expected. Since Kabaria and Jebel Jalloud had virtually no foreign fighters, I took for granted that it would be easy to build rapport with knowledgeable local residents. So I spent more time cultivating relationships with residents in Douar Hicher than in either Kabaria or Jebel Jalloud. Since I started with Douar Hicher and had success securing interviews, this led me to be overly confident in my success elsewhere. Once I started building relationships with social workers who had lived and worked in Kabaria, I eliminated Jebel Jalloud. In retrospect, it may have

been premature to not try to cultivate relationships in Jebel Jalloud and see which one bore fruit.

Table 3.4 Final Evaluation of Case Study Delegations in Greater Tunis

Delegation Name	Correlation Coeff.	S-Statistic	Final Evaluation
Douar Hicher	1***	4.74E-10	SELECTED as <u>High</u> Foreign Fighter Neighbourhood
Ettadhamen	0.982***	37805	High Rate of Foreign Fighters
Sidi Hassine	0.969***	65564	High Rate of Foreign Fighters
Oued Ellil	0.964***	77096	Moderate Rate of Foreign Fighters; Rejected on Field Assessment.
Mnihla	0.958***	89585	High Rate of Foreign Fighters
Fouchana	0.957***	91239	Low Rate of Foreign Fighters; Rejected on Field Assessment (Not Comparable).
Jebel Jalloud	0.955***	97037	Low Rate of Foreign Fighters; Rejected on SIZE; ACCESS (see below)
Hrairia	0.955***	97154	High Rate of Foreign Fighters.
Sijoumi	0.953***	99996	High Rate of Foreign Fighters.
Mohammedia	0.952***	102456	Low Rate of Foreign Fighters; Rejected on Field Assessment (Not Comparable).
Kabaria	0.943***	122725	SELECTED as <u>Low</u> Foreign Fighter Neighbourhood.

*Note: Robust standard errors in parenthesis. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Intercepts not shown. Grey text means eliminated from contention as a possible comparison to Douar Hicher.*

In many ways, it was more difficult to meet and interview residents of Kabaria than it was in Douar Hicher. I had hoped a social worker who worked in Kabaria for over a decade would be able to broker interviews for me. However, he proved more interested in trying to use me for political connections or payment. After three visits to Kabaria in 2019, he had brokered interviews with two people. In 2020, I returned to focus exclusively on arranging interviews in Kabaria, where instead of this person, I relied on a friend whose cousin grew up in Kabaria. This introduction opened up interviews

with many more residents of the neighbourhood, which gave me the opportunity to conduct observations in the area safely. Once that relationship formed, I had much deeper access into Kabaria. However, at the outset, I took for granted that my criteria of “access” would be the easiest part.

Figure 3.9 Map of Greater Tunis with Selected Delegations Highlighted



Source: shapefiles from the Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM, 2018); compiled by author

Despite the challenges of arranging interviews, the more I investigated Kabaria the more it appeared to have key factors in common with Douar Hicher. It was roughly as close to the city centre as Douar Hicher. And, although it was more densely populated, it had a reputation for criminality that was similar to Douar Hicher. “I used to joke that when I worked in a prison, I should just open up two clinics [on the outside]: one in Douar Hicher and one in Kabaria, and then I could just see all my patients there instead of here,” explained one psychologist who worked in the prisons around Greater

Tunis (Abbas, July 2, 2019). Although access still proved difficult in Kabaria, Kabaria and Douar Hicher passed all three tests. First, they were quite *similar*, as captured by the 2014 census and in their reputations as working-class neighbourhoods stigmatized by criminality and informality. They also had shared similar social histories: both neighbourhoods were formed by the first waves of rural-urban migration in Tunisia starting in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Second, the delegations also *differed* on the outcome variable of interest. While Douar Hicher was the source of a relatively large number of foreign fighters, Kabaria appeared to have a low rate of foreign fighters based on what I had learned from a field visit, in-person review of police arrest records, and civil servant testimony. I was able to confirm via a fourth method that few fighters came from Kabaria indirectly via government security sources. I attended a workshop sponsored by a European government grant as an observer in February 2019. The workshop was related to social stability and militant recruitment in Greater Tunis. The program asked police, social workers, and civilian activists from Tunis to suggest places where there were high rates of recruitment to run the program. No one in the conference mentioned Kabaria as a candidate for the program, although many other neighbourhoods were suggested – including Douar Hicher and some of the other areas I had already eliminated for having high rates of recruitment.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

With my case studies selected, my fieldwork in Tunisia included two parts: 1) first-person observations about community conditions, and 2) semi-structured

interviews with community leaders, knowledgeable local residents (i.e., social workers), and friends and family of foreign fighters. Fieldwork took place over four separate visits totalling approximately 75 days between 2019 and 2020. During those visits, I conducted 94 interviews. Most of those I interviewed were from Douar Hicher and Kabaria or had worked in these neighbourhoods. A minority of interviews were with experts who helped me understand the political context or the activity of Salafi-Jihadis in Tunisia, such as researchers, politicians, and civil activists (see Appendix L for a list of people interviewed). This section describes my fieldwork in Tunisia.

No part of this research was possible without trusted intermediaries who were local to the neighbourhoods I studied. I learned this approach from my prior fieldwork in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. I also followed Marcusa's advice: "I could not reach out to research contacts on my own," he wrote about his fieldwork in Tunisia, "every conversation I entered had to be organized through at least one person who could 'vouch' for me and give me credibility" (Marcusa, 2018, p. 54). To facilitate introductions, I worked with the director of a local NGO who organizes programmes with family and friends of fighters who departed for ISIS, and a local researcher and advisor on issues related to Tunisian terrorism and insurgency. I relied on their initial introductions to meet prominent members of the communities I wanted to study (e.g., community activists, business leaders, religious figures).

My observations about community conditions involved visiting either Douar Hicher or Kabaria almost every day. I tried to write a "thick description" of daily life (Geertz, 1973, p. 19-20) by observing and recording key daily life events. These included

observing morning and evening commutes during workdays, who picked up students from school, and who populated cafes on workdays and weekends. To ensure my safety while I did these observations, I conducted these observations after I had built up rapport with several interview subjects who were from the neighbourhood – these were people I could call who could vouch for me if my presence in the neighbourhood was challenged. I was keenly aware of the fact that I was being observed while conducting my observations. It was therefore safer to be known in the community while I was walking around the neighbourhood rather than to hope to remain anonymous. This was also true for Varese (2001; 2021), whose reflections on studying organized crime while based in Perm, Russia provided me with guidance on how to record observations and conduct interviews while being known and watched in a neighbourhood whose residents were generally suspicious of outsiders.

I conducted my interviews via a snowball sampling technique in which the first people I interviewed were introduced to me through friends I made before my research project began who were researchers and civil society activists. Most people I interviewed trusted me because they trusted the people that made introductions for me. Those who agreed to an interview had candid discussions with me because of their pre-existing relationships with my friends. After one or more interviews, some people trusted me enough to introduce me to others they knew. In total, I conducted 71 interviews with people who were knowledgeable about the neighbourhoods or who were personally connected to people who went to fight in Syria. Ten of those interviews were with Tunisian politicians and local and foreign experts on Tunisian Salafi-Jihadism. I

conducted an additional 23 interviews on background, with subjects who helped provide me context about topics like neighbourhoods conditions while I was selecting my case studies or, in general, about politics in Tunisia.

Interviews usually lasted at least one hour, were often two hours, and sometimes occurred over several days (see Appendix L for a list of interviews). These interviews were semi-structured, which gave me the chance to ask pre-determined, but open-ended questions that centred around what happened to people who were recruited to join the network of Salafi-Jihadists and who became fighters with ISIS in Syria. My research did not rely on interviews with individuals who joined ISIS because I did not probe about the joiners' motivations. Instead, I focused on questions that examined a recruits' relationships and how they were recruited to fight in Syria. I believe these questions can also be answered by close friends and family just as well as the individual foreign fighters.

For semi-structured interviews, I had two main points of inquiry. The first was to ask about what happened in the months after the revolution. After the revolution in Tunisia, grassroots networks of Salafi-Jihadis seized control of mosques (Gall, 2015; Blioua, 2014), and also were among several groups that emerged to ensure public safety in the absence of normal police function (Hanau Santini, 2018). Therefore, local contests over the use of mosque and public safety were of particular interest when I interviewed someone about their experience in the months following the revolution. The second line of inquiry for my interviews will attempt to understand the impact of social networks on mobilization. These questions were my main focus with friends and family

members of foreign fighters. For example, how did the fighter first get involved in activities that led to their being recruited to join ISIS? Did their relationships change as they were being recruited?

Due to the sensitive nature of these interviews, interviews I cite using only first names are anonymous. Subjects that asked or were offered the chance of anonymity were granted it. Such opportunity was provided to regular citizens but not public figures (i.e., politicians) or people who have shared their thoughts on the topic of this dissertation for the public record by name. I also included in Appendix L a list of the interviews I conducted on background. Two residents were worried that they might be identified not just by name, but by the personal details they shared. They asked that I add a second layer of anonymity to obscure their relationship to the person(s) they knew who went to Syria. For those two interviews, if I interviewed the brother of someone who went to Syria, that brother might become a cousin. No other details of their story were changed. I chose substitute relatives carefully to represent as close as possible to the actual relationship with the person I interviewed (i.e., cousins and siblings or fathers and uncles). This was done to stay as close as possible to the details of their story while still respecting their desire for greater anonymity. Interviews are cited in this dissertation by their name or pseudonym, along with the exact date when the interview was conducted.

In order to protect myself and those I interviewed, interviews in Douar Hicher and Kabaria were done during the day and in neutral locations. I preferred interviews to take place inside a social welfare office in the neighbourhood, where it would be common for residents to enter and not uncommon for foreigners to be present (i.e., as aid workers

or donors whose funding supported local community work). In other cases, I would meet people for interviews at cafes in neighbourhoods where it would be safe for them to visit. These were the main places where my most sensitive interviews took place. On two occasions, however, interviews took place inside my friend's car as we drove around Tunis. Other interviews were to gather contextual information and were conducted with people who did not reside in Douar Hicher or the surrounding area (i.e., with experts or politicians). These interviews were usually conducted in an office.

I recorded consent using an audio recorder on my phone in all but two of my interviews. My audio recorder was my phone, which had a microphone of sufficient enough quality to pick up the interview. Everyone who I interviewed consented to being interviewed beforehand, and they benefitted as I did from my phone functioning as a recording device, since it looked completely innocuous on a table. People in Tunis commonly put their phones on the table when they meet for a social gathering. I used a translator on the occasions where the people I interviewed spoke in Tunisian dialect, which was particularly common among respondents in Douar Hicher or Kabaria. The woman working with me as a translator was married woman and a mother. She dressed conservatively and grew up in one of the interior regions of Tunisia. Her appearance and personal biography helped put my interviewees at ease since many also trace their family origins to the interior regions of Tunisia. This helped us fit in when we conducted interviews.

When I was not conducting interviews or transcribing them, I would visit Douar Hicher and Kabaria at various times of the day and walk through the neighbourhood to

observe daily life. These observations helped me see, for example, how difficult it was to commute to work: how few taxis stopped near the neighbourhood and how long it took to walk to the nearest bus or metro stop. I also experienced how boring it was to sit in the same café all day and drink a single cup of coffee, as many young men would do before being approached by recruiters (Ibtesem, June 20, 2019; Zain, February 18, 2019). These experiences helped me understand the daily struggles of life in Douar Hicher or Kabaria, and how these contributed to one's sense of isolation and exclusion.

3.2.3 Limitations of the Qualitative Approach in this Dissertation

This section will address four challenges I faced in my fieldwork. First, I tried to elicit information about decisions taken at least five years ago. This particular challenge may be compounded by the fact that I am unlikely to interview the person in question (i.e., the foreign fighter), but instead their close family and friends. It is also compounded by my status as an American. The nature of my political, personal, and in-country contacts put me in a particular position which might further limit the extent to which I am able to elicit candid information in interviews – or to secure interviews at all. Second, once joining ISIS became illegal, it is unclear why informants or their friends and family would want to offer candid information about these activities even if they were able to remember them clearly. Third, I could not live in the neighbourhoods, which is recommended for rigorous ethnographic work (Varese, 2021). And fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic limited my ability to return to Tunisia for additional fieldwork.

All four concerns raised above speak to the extent to which I am able to collect useful and/or honest information from my interview subjects and observations. While I employed several strategies to mitigate these challenges, I could not eliminate them entirely. I needed to use my best judgment and make difficult choices about the validity of material collected during interviews, when to press interviewees for greater detail, the extent to which I or the people I interviewed may or may not be in personal danger, and other factors. Several of my strategies for collecting candid and accurate accounts while conducting fieldwork safely are expressed below.⁶

First, although I am an American, I have several years' experience doing qualitative interviews under difficult and stressful circumstances on politically sensitive topics in the Arabic-speaking world. I conducted research in Syria during the start of its civil war from 2012-2014, where my main task was to investigate humanitarian conditions in parts of Syria controlled by anti-Assad forces. These projects included managing as many as 30-40 researchers working in Syria at any one time. It also involved conducting interviews myself – either in person in Turkey or online via Skype. These interviews included difficult conversations in which interviewees had an incentive to mislead, since they were speaking about their humanitarian assistance needs and believed I could be influential in helping procure them.

I learned two methods from that experience that I applied to this fieldwork. First, I asked for more details, since it is easy to make wild claims, but much harder to make

⁶ I developed these strategies based on discussions with foreign nationals who conduct research in Tunisia. They included: Christopher Barrie, Rory McCarthy, Anne Wolf, Michael Marcusa, and Aaron Zelin.

up evidence on the fly to support them. Second, I would try to verify claims by asking others. If I learned that someone had lied about an answer, it made me more sceptical of the rest of their answers in our interview. There were sections of several interviews I rejected because of this, and one interview I completely discarded because the person being interviewed was too unreliable. I also found that, as I learned more, I could solicit better information from my interviewees. Once I demonstrated my knowledge of the subject matter, later interview subjects realized they could not get away with making unsubstantiated assertions – even to an American.

People I interviewed also respected me more when they realized I took the time to become an expert. I needed to demonstrate to people from the communities where I was doing my fieldwork that I respected their challenges and was trying to understand the nuances of the choices they made. Reflecting back on my fieldwork, I think they appreciated the fact that I had taken the time to research what had happened in both communities I studied. Even though I was an American, and this likely shaped the responses of people who spoke with me in ways that I will not know, I believe my knowledge of the subject encouraged them to be more candid. It also helped that, as I developed relationships with multiple respondents, I could gain introductions to new sources. A new source that received multiple references from those who they trusted meant they were likely to be more honest with me. This mitigated against the issues I faced regarding my social position.

Getting people to trust me enough to talk about something that, for many, was a difficult subject, was perhaps the biggest challenge I faced conducting interviews. The

only way that I could build trust over a short time was by introductions from friends. On several occasions, I was told by the person I interviewed that they never would have spoken to me were it not for the fact that our mutual friend recommended me. Nevertheless, there were some highly sensitive topics that I could not broach with certain people, even after several interviews. On several occasions, people only felt comfortable sharing their answers to particularly sensitive questions if I asked them indirectly through our mutual friend. Those friends would speak to the interviewee first and then share the details with me later.

Second, the subject matter covers activities that occurred in the past that either were then or are now considered illegal. There were three specific factors about my research approach that mitigated, but did not eliminate, these concerns. The first factor was that I focused on the period from mid-2013 to mid-2014, when joining ISIS was most socially acceptable. As Abouzeid (2018) found in her research on the Syrian war, most communities were simply not yet aware of the atrocities ISIS had committed until they became more public starting in 2015. Following Dawson and Amarasingam (2017), I tried to be as empathetic as possible to the choices the family and friends of my interviewees had made. The second factor was that my research did not require anyone divulge personally identifiable information in the interviews. Although I knew the person I was interviewing had known someone who joined ISIS, I did not need any names – neither of the fighter nor his contacts. I emphasized my interest was not reporting information to the authorities, but in understanding how these individuals were recruited to join ISIS. The third factor was that joining ISIS during the time period I conducted my

fieldwork was not as taboo a topic in Tunisia or in the communities where I was conducting my research. Those involved in helping set up my research in Tunisia were already having these conversations with the very same people I had interviewed. Although it was a sensitive topic that occurred years ago, I was not asking them to divulge anything they had not already shared with the people who vouched for me and who helped me set up the interviews.

Third, my advisor and I decided it was unsafe for me to live in Douar Hicher and Kabaria while conducting fieldwork. Although I spent time there during the day, it was not possible for me to spend the evenings there given the security situation. People I interviewed encouraged me to “stand by the wall” with them in order to understand the boredom of everyday life, and therefore the appeal of something as new and interesting as Salafi-Jihadism (Abbas and Amir, March 1, 2020). Yet during my fieldwork on June 26, 2019, two suicide bombers exploded themselves in downtown Tunis, and on March 6, two more suicide bombers attacked U.S. Embassy Tunis while I was nearby. In the 2019 attack, one of the perpetrators was from Douar Hicher, and the bombers planned their attack in a mosque near the neighbourhood (Saidani, 2019). In response to that attack, I ceased my walks through the neighbourhood and had to cancel the remaining nine days of my interviews with people from Douar Hicher. Some of these interviews were with civil servants who had been taking a calculated risk speaking with me about their work. Others were families or friends of known Salafi-Jihadists and who were likely to be monitored more closely by security after the attack. Speaking to a foreigner would raise suspicions about them, and neither they nor I wanted to raise added attention.

Inadvertently, the 2019 attack exposed a facet of the anti-establishment culture of Douar Hicher (described in more detail in Chapter Five). Mohsen, a resident of the neighbourhood, explained to me that Douar Hicher was “locked down” after the attacks. “Nothing personal,” he said, after cancelling our interview, “but in times like these, our response [people from Douar Hicher] is not to talk to anyone” (Mohsen, June 27, 2019).

The fourth limitation was the COVID-19 outbreak, which shut down travel while I was conducting fieldwork in Tunisia in March 2020. I left Tunisia on March 7, 2020 with the intention of returning several more times during the year. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 led me to cut short my fieldwork in Kabaria. COVID-19 limited my ability to return to Tunis and develop deeper relationships with residents of Kabaria in particular. I intended to return to Kabaria, since, following Varese (2021), I believed extending length of my stay in the neighbourhood would be a sign that residents could trust me. A longer stay may have added more depth into our understanding of how AST recruitment efforts were confronted and rejected in Kabaria. For example, Chapter Six describes confrontations with AST adherents in two mosques in Kabaria. At the beginning of March, I was developing relationships with Kabaria residents who witnessed the confrontations. But I was unable to speak to the imams of these mosques without being in Tunis in person, and as a result of COVID was unable to pursue those stories in greater depth.

Overall, I drew on my experience conducting qualitative research in the Arabic-speaking world, often on difficult subjects (i.e., in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq), on lessons learned by others who conducted similar fieldwork in Tunisia (i.e., Marcusa, 2018; Zelin,

2020; al-Hajj Salem, 2014; Merone and Cavatorta, 2013; Miller, 2018) and elsewhere (Staniland, 2014 for focused qualitative research; Whyte, 1943 and Geertz, 1973 for guidance on observations; Varese, 2001; Hamill, 2010; Khalil, 2020; and Horgan, 2008 among others for guides on conducting challenging interviews in politically volatile environments). Finally, I relied on the good judgment of my Tunisian friends and colleagues who helped introduce me to the people whose stories made my fieldwork possible.

3.3. Secondary Data Sources – ISIS Foreign Fighters on Social Media

I reviewed secondary data sources, primarily social media data on ISIS foreign fighters, to deepen my understanding of the mechanisms of recruitment. I also used them to mitigate some of the challenges posed by fieldwork, such as to reinforce or dispute what interviewees may have told me about recruitment. Fortunately, ISIS social media production was prolific. This included not just official propaganda output (e.g., analysed by Winter, 2020; Ingram et al., 2020), but also the myriad sites ISIS fighters, supporters, potential joiners, and curious undecideds could share online (e.g., as described in Stern and Berger, 2015). My data examines joiners from 2013-14, a period of considerable output on social media – not only by ISIS official sources, but also individual fighters and supporters. ISIS social media output during this time was prolific because social media platforms were not aggressively deleting ISIS content until 2015 (Stern and Berger, 2015), and because it was easy to travel to Syria, so fighters were not wary at that point of publishing information about it (Hijrah, 2015).

This dissertation utilises three types of ISIS social media content: 1) self-reported testimonies by fighters about how they joined ISIS published on social media; 2) official ISIS propaganda; and 3) biographies of fighters produced by friends and fellow combatants. The sources for these materials are explained below.

The first source of social media material this dissertation utilises are testimonies about joining ISIS written by the fighters themselves. New joiners to ISIS were encouraged to publish their personal testimony of how they joined ISIS. These testimonies were called *quṣa nufir*. Nufir translates as “bugle” or “trumpet,” and quṣa as “stories” – so literally “trumpet stories.” It is perhaps more accurately translated as “call stories,” as in the call of a bugle in wartime. Quṣa nufir are perhaps better understood as stories intended to encourage others to join the fight. It developed as a meme in Salafi-Jihadi culture - a person posting his quṣa nufir gained greater status among ISIS foreign fighters and their *mujtahidūn* – or community of online supporters (Stern and Berger, 2015).

A newly arrived fighter gained notoriety and acclaim if he posted his quṣa nufir as evidence that he arrived successfully in ISIS territory. Some accounts even describe unsuccessful attempts, like a failed border crossings or encounters with border police (Jurh, 2015). These stories often include valuable biographical details about foreign fighters’ origins, including where he or she grew up, how they were convinced to join ISIS, how they eventually reached Syria, and who helped them along the way (i.e., Jazrawi, 2014).

The second and third sources of social media content this dissertation uses are biographical information available online about ISIS fighters and shared by their fellow combatants or official ISIS propaganda outlets. While most of this material has been removed by the websites that originally hosted the content (i.e., Twitter or Facebook), much of the original material is preserved on the Internet archive website, “The Wayback Machine” (<https://web.archive.org/>). Sometimes, biographical material can be found in travel guides for foreign fighters (Hijrah, 2015), or chat rooms like ask.fm, where ISIS fighters answer questions for potential joiners or curious supporters (Singer, 2018; Frenkel, 2016). Internet diaries describing life in the caliphate (e.g., Sham Stories, 2015), or websites about the Syrian civil war also collected and saved this content (Symbols of the Syrian Revolution, 2016). Usually several articles in each edition of official ISIS propaganda would profile a fighter, ideologues, or supporter of the group which would have biographical detail (Dabiq, 2016b and 2016c). One of the richest sources of biographical material in this category are the eulogies of dead fighters by their compatriots (@anonymous, 2014). It was customary for ISIS fighters to memorialize their friends by eulogizing them online after they died. Their stories would often, although not always, include biographical detail about the fighters (i.e., where they grew up, how they were radicalized). In particular, these sources were useful because they were contemporaneous, improvised, and not controlled by official ISIS media sources. They read as if they were relayed by the fighters from what they had heard while speaking with the fighter in question. Although not necessarily as useful as material written by the person in question, they were often quite informative.

In addition to the material described above, I will also examine more formal secondary sources. These include published interviews with ISIS fighters by other researchers (e.g., Mironova, 2019), articles that have already collected and translated excerpts of the type of material explained above (e.g., al-'Ubaydi, 2014), and compiled biographies of more prominent foreign fighters (e.g., Hamid, 2018; Bunzel, 2014). News articles will also be used, but mainly to provide context.

I acknowledge that all the secondary sources listed above have flaws. Individual stories posted on social media are likely to be exaggerated and full of unverifiable facts. Official ISIS propaganda material distorts individual stories for recruitment purposes. Interviews with returning foreign fighters have various issues regarding sampling bias and, undoubtedly, a lack of candour on the part of their interview subjects. I intend to treat all of these sources with caution, as I will my own data and interviews, and use my best judgment about how to treat each piece of source material.

CHAPTER 4 | Where do Hubs Form?

What Factors Characterize Hubs of ISIS Foreign Fighters Recruitment?

“Raise your head high, for today—by Allah’s grace—you have a state and caliphate, which will return your dignity, might, rights, and leadership...It is a caliphate that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami (Levantine), Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi (North African), American, French, German, and Australian. Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another. Their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goal, in one pavilion, enjoying this blessing, the blessing of faithful brotherhood. If kings were to taste this blessing, they would abandon their kingdoms and fight over this grace. So, all praise and thanks are due to Allah.”

- Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Speech from Mosul, July 2014
(as cited in Dabiq, 2014, p. 7)

Introduction

This chapter’s main purpose is to demonstrate the influence of recruitment hubs on the mobilization of ISIS foreign fighters statistically across the Arabic-speaking world. First, it shows how a disproportionate number of ISIS foreign fighters joined in hubs. Second, it shows that the profile of recruits who were joining ISIS, not just their number, may have changed depending on whether or not they were recruited in a hub. Third, this chapter identifies the socioeconomic factors that ISIS recruitment hubs in the Arabic-speaking world had in common when they were hubs.

A more detailed outline of the chapter is as follows. Section 4.1 introduces descriptive statistics of the fighters who joined ISIS from the Arabic-speaking world

(4.1.1), and provides a more detailed definition of hubs and summarizes how many fighters were recruited from hubs (4.1.2). Section 4.2 compares the profile of an ISIS fighter with the conditions where they were recruited. Section 4.2.1 introduces the differences in fighter profiles based on whether or not they were recruited in a hub. Section 4.2.2 distinguishes between the selection effect – effects that were specific to provinces that were hubs – and effects on fighters as a result of their being recruited in hubs. The conclusion from Section 4.2 is that hubs may have affected not just *how many* people joined ISIS, but also *who* joined ISIS. Fighters who were recruited from hubs were different from those recruited from non-hubs and, to a certain extent, hubs changed type of fighter recruited to join ISIS.

If fighters are recruited in such large numbers from such a small number of places, and if these places shaped the types of people who became fighters, then it is important to understand what conditions hubs have in common. Section 4.3 identifies some of the socioeconomic characteristics that ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs shared in common with one another. The first part of Section 4.3 introduces four hypotheses that might explain where hubs formed based on extant literature (4.3.1). The rest of this section tests each of these hypotheses independently (4.3.2) and combines them (4.3.3) to determine what best characterizes where hubs of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment formed. Section 4.4 concludes this chapter by considering the mechanisms behind the results, comparing them to the theoretical insights from past literature, and connecting these findings to the rest of the dissertation project.

4.1. Statistics of ISIS Foreign Fighters and Hubs

4.1.1. Background of ISIS's Foreign Fighters

This section presents descriptive statistics about fighters from the Arabic-speaking world in comparison to the rest of the fighters who joined ISIS from other parts of the world. Descriptive statistics about ISIS foreign fighters from the Arabic-speaking world are available based on their answers to certain questions they were asked when they first registered with ISIS. Based on these answers, fighters from the Arabic-speaking world appear to present a different profile than fighters from elsewhere in the world in several ways (see Table 4.1 below).

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics about ISIS Foreign Fighters from the Arabic-Speaking World and the Rest of the World

	Arabic-speaking (n=2090)	Rest of World (n=1489)	Significance Tests [^]
Age			
Average Birth Year	1987.5	1987.3	$z = 1.5$
Marital status			
Percent single	76%	54%	$z = 7.3^{***}$
Religious Knowledge			
Percent "basic" knowledge	66%	76%	$z = 3.3^{***}$
Education Levels			
1 = Primary or less	5%	8%	$\chi = 35.8^{***}$
2 = Some secondary	20%	23%	
3 = Graduated high school	40%	44%	
4 = Some university	15%	11%	
5 = University grad. or more	20%	14%	
Previous Profession			
1 = Unemployed or subsistence	18%	21%	$\chi = 83.2^{***}$
2 = Student or unskilled	29%	31%	
3 = Blue collar labour	31%	38%	
4 = Professional	18%	8%	
5 = Advanced professional	4%	2%	
Foreign Travel History			
Mean countries visited	1.3	1.7	$z = -5.5^{***}$
Previous Combat Experience			
Percent yes	8%	12%	$z = -3.3^{***}$

[^] - chi-squared tests used for categorical variables (education levels and previous profession); z-tests were used for all others.

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); Professional score #1 corresponds to farmer, day labourer, unemployed; Score #2 to painter, university student; Score #3 to trader, repairman; Score #4 to government employee; Score #5 to doctor, engineer. These scores were based on expected wages per profession, see Chapter 3.1.1.

Figures from Table 4.1 show that fighters from the Arabic-speaking world were more likely to be single than fighters from elsewhere in the world, fewer had self-professed “basic” knowledge of Islam than elsewhere,⁷ they were generally better educated and more gainfully employed, but they were less well travelled and far fewer fighters from the Arabic-speaking world had combat experience (eight percent) than ISIS foreign fighters from elsewhere (12 percent). More specifically, 35 percent of ISIS foreign fighters from the Arabic-speaking world had at least some form of university education, while only 25 percent of fighters from the rest of the world had similar education levels. Fighters from the Arabic-speaking world were also more gainfully employed – 22 percent reported professional employment and only 11 percent were unemployed, while 10 percent of fighters from elsewhere held professional employment and 14 percent were unemployed.

It is outside the scope of this dissertation to surmise why these differences distinguish fighters from the Arabic-speaking world. However, the extent of these differences suggests that there are limitations to how much we can generalize about the specific conditions that may lead to a person being recruited – or even to a hub forming – in one region or another. It underscores the context-dependent nature of foreign fighter recruitment: certain structural characteristics or logics of participation in one place might not apply in another, or even at different points during recruitment for the

⁷ Fighters were asked in the forms to list their “level of shari’a expertise.” The choices were “advanced,” “intermediate,” and “basic.” Their answers are described here as “self-professed” because it was most likely a self-assessment provided to the ISIS official by the fighter. There is no evidence that there was a specific test for religious knowledge administered by ISIS officials for the purposes of filling out the registration form.

same conflict (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). This should give us pause about the generalizability of the specific findings in this section, such as whether or not fighters are better educated in recruitment hubs. But it does not necessarily negate the underlying findings presented here about the process of their recruitment, for example that fighters may be more likely recruited in hubs than non-hubs, or that hubs may affect the propensity of different types of people to be recruited.

4.1.2. Defining Hubs

For the purposes of this dissertation, hubs are provinces in the Arabic-speaking world where the per capita rate of ISIS foreign fighter recruits was more than double the average rate of recruitment for the Arabic-speaking world. As a whole, the Arabic-speaking world had an average province rate of 0.86 ISIS foreign fighter recruits per 100,000 local national Sunni Muslim residents. So, a “hub” would be any province with a per capita rate of recruitment of 1.72 persons per 100,000 (see Section 3.1.3 for more detail on these calculations). I include a sensitivity analysis that compares results presented in this chapter with two different definitions of a hub: one that is 1.5 times the average rate of recruitment, and a second that is three times the average rate (see Appendix H).

Based on this definition of a hub, there were 45 hubs out of 255 provinces (18 percent) in the 17 countries of the Arabic-speaking world. As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, these hubs constituted 11 percent of the total population of the Arabic-speaking world, yet 75 percent of ISIS foreign fighters were recruited from them. The

graph in Figure 2.1 of Chapter Two showed how ISIS foreign fighters concentrated in a power-law-like distribution once indexed to the population of the provinces they were recruited from. This follows the Pareto principle, which states that, for many outcomes, approximately 80 percent of the consequences come from 20 percent of the causes (Pareto, 1964; Hardy, 2010). Table 4.2 shows the top ten provinces by per capita recruitment rates, demonstrating that a large number of fighters joined from a small number of provinces.

Table 4.2 ISIS Foreign Fighters by Province – Top Hubs

Rank Number	Delegation	Country	Total Fighters	Total Population*	ISIS Fighters Per Capita
1	Derna	Libya	34	163,351	21.50
2	Muharraq	Bahrain	19	117,884	18.96
3	Kebili	Tunisia	27	156,961	17.40
4	S. Governorate	Bahrain	7	123,787	16.16
5	Tunis	Tunisia	136	1,056,247	13.00
6	Qassim	Saudi Arabia	135	1,116,340	12.22
7	Bizerte	Tunisia	58	568,219	10.30
8	Sidi Bouzid	Tunisia	35	429,912	8.20
9	Jahra	Kuwait	9	185,819	7.45
10	Benghazi	Libya	47	670,797	7.20
Subtotal	10	5	507	4,589,317	13.24
Total	255	17	2090	282,823,346	0.86

Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; compiled by author; a full list of provinces is in Appendix D; min. six fighters

** - Population figures presented here are discounted by local Sunni Muslim populations; for sources, see Appendix G.*

It is worth noting that the top ten hubs listed in Table 4.2 were provinces with a mix of sizes by population, but their average population (458,932), was smaller than the average population of a province in the Arabic-speaking countries overall (1.1 million). Only two of the top ten hubs with the highest rates of ISIS foreign fighters had populations over one million people (Tunis and Qassim), while five had populations less than 200,000. One main reason why hubs were important, therefore, is that a large

number of ISIS's foreign fighters were recruited from these places, yet they represented a small fraction of the total population of the region.

If 75 percent of the total number of ISIS foreign fighters joined from provinces that constituted 11 percent of the total population of the Arabic-speaking world, and 42 percent of ISIS foreign fighters came from the Middle East and North Africa (Barrett, 2017), we may conclude that one in three of all the foreign fighters in ISIS joined from one of 45 recruitment hubs in the Arabic-speaking world. These 45 hubs, therefore, were critical for the success of ISIS's foreign fighter recruitment effort.

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics on Hubs of ISIS Foreign Fighter Recruitment

	Number of Provinces	Provinces with >0 fighters	Provinces that are hubs	Percent of hub provinces	Country GDP Per Cap (USD)
Tunisia	24	23	18	75%	4,222.70
Saudi Arabia	13	13	10	77%	24,844.74
Kuwait	6	4	4	67%	49,388.14
Libya	22	9	3	14%	10,363.79
Jordan	12	4	2	17%	4,043.75
Bahrain	4	2	2	50%	24,744.30
Egypt	27	15	1	4%	3,378.60
Morocco	12	9	1	8%	3,121.68
Yemen	21	9	1	5%	1,607.15
Lebanon	8	3	1	13%	7,931.08
Qatar	7	2	1	14%	85,050.87
UAE	7	1	1	14%	42,412.63
Algeria	48	11	0	0%	5,448.78
Palestine	2	2	0	0%	3,562.33
Sudan	18	2	0	0%	1,557.23
Oman	11	1	0	0%	20,865.79
Mauritania	13	1	0	0%	1,892.10
Total	255	111	45	18%	6,689.93 (median)

Note: compiled by the author using ISIS foreign fighter registration forms data and World Bank data on GDP per capita

Table 4.3 shows how these recruitment hubs were distributed across the 17 countries studied herein. Tunisia and Saudi Arabia had more hubs than the rest of the

countries in the Arabic-speaking world combined. Analysis in later sections accounts for the potential bias this poses by controlling for Tunisia and Saudi Arabia in separate robustness checks (Appendix I). Not only were the majority of hubs in the Middle East from Tunisia and Saudi Arabia (28 in 45), but the majority of provinces in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia were hubs. This shows how widespread the phenomenon of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment was in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Finally, beyond Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, it is worth highlighting the final column in Table 4.3, which shows that many foreign fighter hubs, with Tunisia excepted, came from countries in the top half of the wealth distribution based on per capita gross domestic product (GDP).

4.2. How do ISIS Fighters Compare to the Provinces they Came From?

4.2.1 Are ISIS Foreign Fighters Recruited in Hubs Different from those Recruited in Non-Hubs?

From the answers provided by newly registered ISIS foreign fighters from the Arabic-speaking world, it appears as though the backgrounds of fighters who joined from hubs were different in several ways from those who joined from non-hubs.

Table 4.4 Socioeconomic Backgrounds of ISIS Fighters by Recruitment

	<i>Hubs (n=1546)</i>	<i>Non-hubs (n=544)</i>	<i>Significance Tests[^]</i>
Age			
Average Birth Year	1988.2	1985.8	$z = 6.9^{***}$
Marital status			
Percent single	79%	60%	$z = 6.7^{***}$
Religious Knowledge			
Percent single	67%	63%	$z = 1.9$
Education Levels			
1 = Primary	4%	6%	$\chi = 10.8^*$
2 = Some secondary	19%	23%	
3 = Graduated high school	43%	36%	
4 = Some university	15%	15%	
5 = University or more	19%	20%	
Previous Profession			
1 = Unemployed or subsistence	20%	13%	$\chi = 38.2^{***}$
2 = Student or unskilled	31%	25%	
3 = Blue collar labour	28%	40%	
4 = Professional	19%	16%	
5 = Advanced professional	3%	5%	
Travel History			
Average countries visited	1.4	0.5	$z = 13.5^{***}$
Previous Combat Experience			
Percent yes	7%	12%	$z = -6.5^{***}$

[^] - chi-squared tests were used for categorical variables (education levels; previous profession); z-tests were used for others.

NOTE: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); See Table 4.1 for more details on the professional scores.

According to Table 4.4, ISIS fighters who joined from hubs were, on average, three years younger than those recruited from regions that were not hubs and much less likely to be married. Although younger, fighters recruited from hubs appear slightly better educated, with 77 percent at least graduating high school as compared to 71 percent in non-hubs. But fighters from hubs do not appear better off professionally, with 51 percent reporting being unemployed, students, or having some temporary form of employment. Fighters from hubs also travelled to more foreign countries. Together, the profile of fighters from hubs suggests that fighters were younger, better educated, but not necessarily better employed than those recruited from non-hubs. This fits with Table

4.3 in Section 4.1.2, which showed that hubs mostly formed in countries in the middle or upper end of the wealth distribution (the median GDP per capita of the top five hub-producing countries was \$10,363.79, while the median GDP per capita in the five countries in which no hubs formed was \$3,562.33). Later in this chapter, we will examine whether these differences are based on selection effects or whether they have something to do with where they were recruited.

Finally, almost half as many fighters recruited from hubs had combat experience. This, combined with the fact that fighters from hubs were generally younger and much more likely to be single, suggests that larger proportions of people who were new to foreign fighting were recruited in hubs. This finding, and the overall conclusion from this section, is that hubs may not have just been responsible for the vast majority of the overall number of recruits, they may have also been the gateway for a new generation of younger, less experienced fighters to join ISIS.

4.2.2 ISIS Fighters and the provinces they came from

The previous section showed that fighters from hubs tended to be younger, were less likely to be married or have an advanced career, and were less likely to have combat experience than those recruited from non-hubs. But it was not clear from those descriptive results if the hubs were different and the fighters merely reflected these conditions, or whether the fighters recruited in those hubs were different. For example, if fighters recruited from hubs were younger than those who joined from non-hubs, to what extent was that because these younger fighters came from places with more

youthful populations? Or are fighters younger than their home province’s demographics because there is some effect in hubs that makes younger people more likely to join?

Figure 4.1 Relationships Tested in the Regression Models in this Chapter

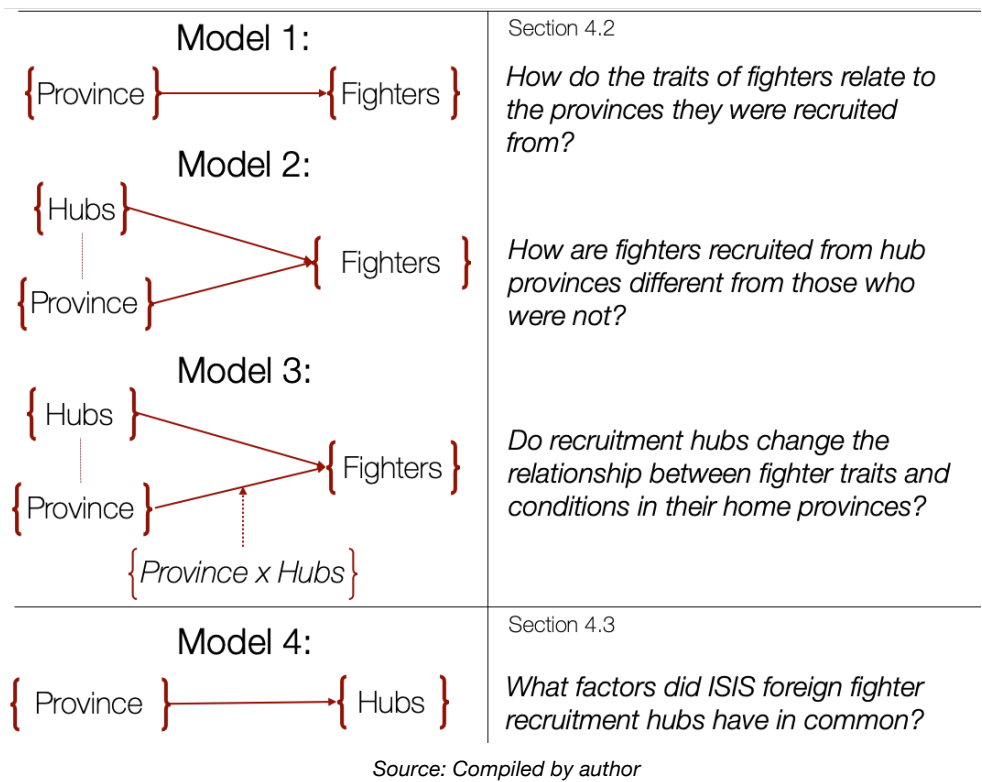


Figure 4.1 above shows the progression of the regression tables in this section (Section 4.2) and the next (Section 4.3). It also outlines the relationships this chapter tests between ISIS fighters, the provinces they were recruited from, and the effect of whether or not that province was a hub of recruitment. Models one, two, and three in Figure 4.2 correspond to models one, two, and three in each regression table in this section. Model one compares the characteristics of provinces directly with the characteristics of the fighters recruited from them. A positive and statistically significant coefficient in this regression, for example, shows that fighter traits reflect the provinces they come from. Model two introduces the hub as a binary control variable. A positive

and statistically significant correlation for the province characteristic, for example, means that fighter traits reflect the provinces they come from *regardless of whether or not the province was a hub*. If, instead, the coefficient for the binary hub variable is statistically significant in either direction, it shows that fighters from hubs have a characteristic that is distinct from fighters recruited in non-hubs. Model three introduces the hub as an interaction term. This result tests whether hubs *moderated* the relationship between provinces characteristics and fighter traits. If the result of the interaction coefficient is statistically significant, it indicates that the strength and direction of the relationship between the fighters' traits and the characteristics of the province where they were recruited depends on whether or not they were recruited from a hub. This is a crucial test, because it could show that hubs changed the type of fighter recruited. If the interaction term is significant, it would indicate that the profile of a fighter changes depending on whether or not they were recruited from a hub.

The results will not necessarily be causal. However, they do help narrow the question for further testing and help refine the theory of hubs presented in this dissertation. Model four shows the relationship tested in Section 4.3, which compares the characteristics of provinces to determine what socioeconomic conditions best describe where ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs formed.

How do Fighters Compare to the Provinces They Came From?

This section uses ISIS foreign fighter characteristics provided in the registration forms as outcome variables of interest, and the socioeconomic conditions in the provinces drawn from census data as explanatory variables. The units of analysis in this

section are fighters, and in this case I compare how much the conditions in those provinces match the traits of the ISIS fighters from those provinces. To determine whether or not a hub affected the relationship between these two traits (the backgrounds of fighters and the conditions of the provinces they came from), this analysis introduces the presence or absence of a hub as a binary interaction term in its regression models.

There are two expected results from this section. First, the relationship between a fighters' background and their home province should change depending on whether or not they were recruited from a hub. Specifically, introducing hubs as an interaction effect should be statistically significant: hubs should serve as a moderating variable between the structural conditions of a province and the traits of the fighters who came from them. Second, the direction of the interaction effect should, overall, show that fighters more closely resemble the underlying socioeconomic conditions in their home provinces if they are recruited in hubs. This would confirm the expectations that fighters in hubs are, all else equal, more likely to be recruited regardless of their socioeconomic status or demographic conditions.

If the first hypothesis presented in this section is correct, we should see at least several of the models have an interaction term that is statistically significant. This would show that, for at least certain traits, hubs moderate the types of people who become fighters relative to the conditions where they were recruited. If the second hypothesis is correct, we should expect the coefficient of the interaction term to be positive. This would indicate that hubs change the profile of fighters to be more positively correlated

with the provinces that they come from (i.e., fighters look more ‘normal’ relative to the conditions in their home province).

This section compares four traits of fighters with the provinces that they were recruited from – age, wealth, educational attainment, and employment status – shown in Table 4.5 below. These four biographical traits were provided to ISIS by newly arrived foreign fighters in their registration forms and were available in some subnationally representative survey data for provinces from each country.

Table 4.5 Characteristics Compared Between Fighters and Provinces

<i>Characteristic/Trait</i>	<i>ISIS Registration Forms (outcome variable)</i>	<i>Country Survey Question (explanatory variable)</i>
1. Age	Proportion of fighters aged 15-29.	Proportion of population aged 15-29.
2. Educational Attainment	Proportion of fighters who graduated university	Proportion of residents who graduated university.
3. Wealth	Fighters’ socioeconomic score (a measure of wealth - see Ch. 3)	Log of monthly household expenditure (in 2013 USD)
4. Employment	Proportion of all fighters who are unemployed	Unemployment Rate
	Proportion of fighters under 30 who are unemployed	Unemployment Rate (aged 25-29)

** See Chapter 3.1.1 for how I compiled and scored fighter socioeconomic background data.*

Not all fighters were included in this analysis due to missing data. This section includes results which normalized the observations, so each model included the same number of observations.⁸ This is to ensure that a change in observations does not affect the results in different models. Each factor listed in Table 4.5 may not be sufficient to

⁸ Since fighter socioeconomic scores are derived from a composite of responses, that trait had far fewer observations (1330) than the rest of the models (ranging from 1914-1973). Standardizing observations to be consistent across all models reduced the final number to 1293. Although this reduced sample is 62 percent of the total (1293 out of 2090), the results are consistent with models that use the maximum number of observations available. For results using maximum observations, please see Appendix J.

measure similarity on its own. However, if several factors show similar results, they may point to tentative conclusions about the extent to which hubs moderate a fighters' backgrounds and conditions in their home province.

Comparing Youth Proportions

This section compares ISIS foreign fighters with the provinces they were recruited from based on the age proportions of their populations. We already know from Table 4.4 that fighters were, on average, three years younger if they joined from hubs than those recruited in non-hubs. These tests determine whether that is because fighters tended to be younger, because hubs had younger populations, or because younger people are more likely to be recruited in a hub. Specifically, this section compares the proportion of fighters under 30 with the proportion of a province's population aged 15-29, and how much that relationship changed (or not) if the fighter was recruited from a hub.⁹

Table 4.6 shows that there is a positive correlation between the proportion of fighters who are young and their home provinces (model one). That means that provinces with younger populations tend to result in a higher proportion of young fighters. In this case, the traits of the fighters are positively correlated with the conditions where they were recruited. This relationship holds in model two when controlling for hubs, which indicates the relationship between the age distribution of fighters and provinces remains consistent regardless of whether the province was a hub. That the

⁹ As almost no one from the fighter sample was younger than 15 when they joined, restricting the fighter sample to all fighters under 30 reflects the census designation of proportions of populations aged 15-29.

hub variable is positive and statistically significant as well confirms what we observed in descriptive tables earlier in the chapter: hubs are places with younger fighters. But the lack of statistical significance in the interaction term in model three suggests that younger fighters were not being recruited because of some condition in hubs. Hubs did not moderate the relationship between fighters and provinces in terms of youth proportions. Overall, the conclusion is that, for age, fighters reflect the conditions where they were recruited, and that, to a certain extent, hubs are places where young fighters tend to join.

Table 4.6 Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province

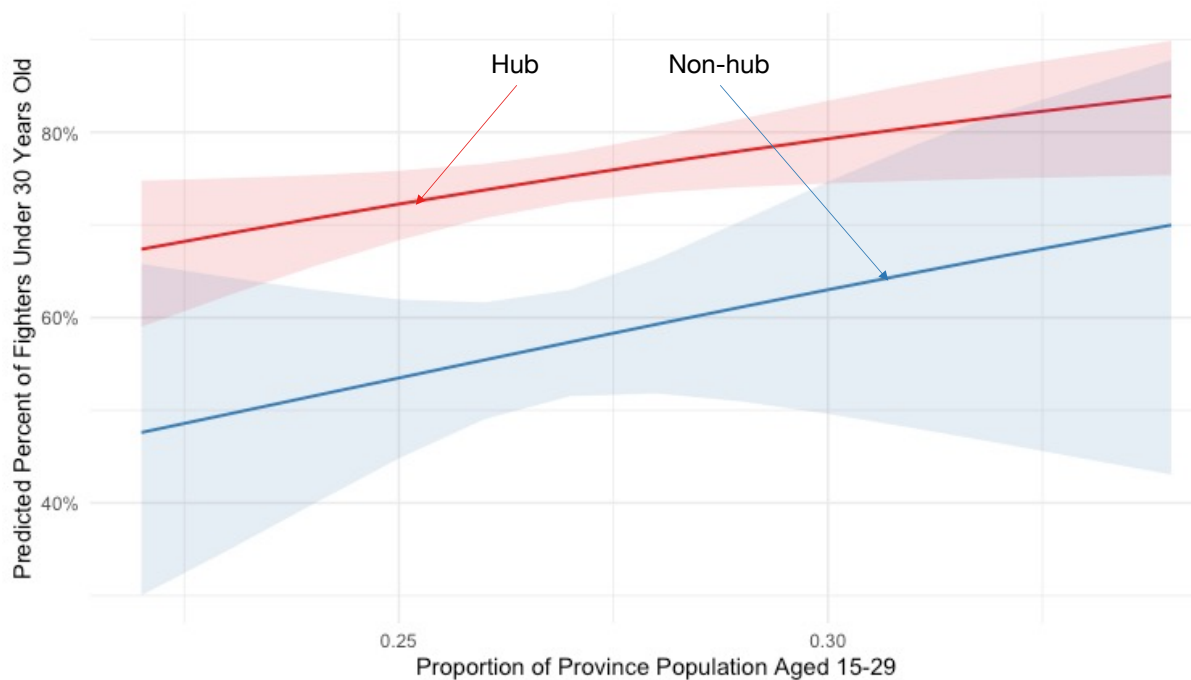
<i>Dependent variable: fighter under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	<i>Model (1)</i>	<i>Model (2)</i>	<i>Model (3)</i>
Youth Proportion of province aged 15-29 years old	1.63 [*] (0.66)	1.53 [*] (0.65)	1.89 (1.68)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.18 ^{***} (0.03)	0.29 (0.49)
Youth x Hub Interaction term			-0.43 (1.82)
Constant	0.27 (0.18)	0.16 (0.18)	0.06 (0.45)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.45		
Adjusted R²	0.004	0.03	0.03
F Statistic	6.14 ^{**}	21.21 ^{***}	14.15 ^{***}

Note: ^{} p < 0.1 ^{*} p < 0.05; ^{**} p < 0.01, ^{***} p < 0.001 (two-tailed).*

The results in Table 4.6 diminish, but do not undermine, the conclusion presented in the previous section, which described hubs as “gateways” for new fighters. Hubs are still places where young fighters are recruited even when holding constant the age proportion of the provinces where they were recruited.

The curve in Figure 4.2 below shows the predicted probabilities of the proportion of fighters under 30 years old when given the proportion of the province aged 15-29. The red curve shows the predicted probabilities for fighter age proportions in hubs, and the blue curve shows those predicted probabilities for fighters who did not come from hubs. These curves are also labelled for black and white viewing. Confidence intervals (at the 95 percent level) are shown in the shading. These curves visualize the lack of an interaction effect shown in Model Three in Table 4.6.

Figure 4.2 Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province



Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; census data; compiled by author

That the red curve runs parallel to the blue one in Figure 4.2 above indicates that the hub interaction term does not change the profiles of fighters relative to the conditions in the province where they were recruited. If the interaction term was significant, the curves would intersect. Instead, the fact that the red curve is consistently higher than

the blue one is further proof of the main finding from model two: that hubs are places with younger fighters regardless of the age distribution of the province.

Comparing University Graduation Rates

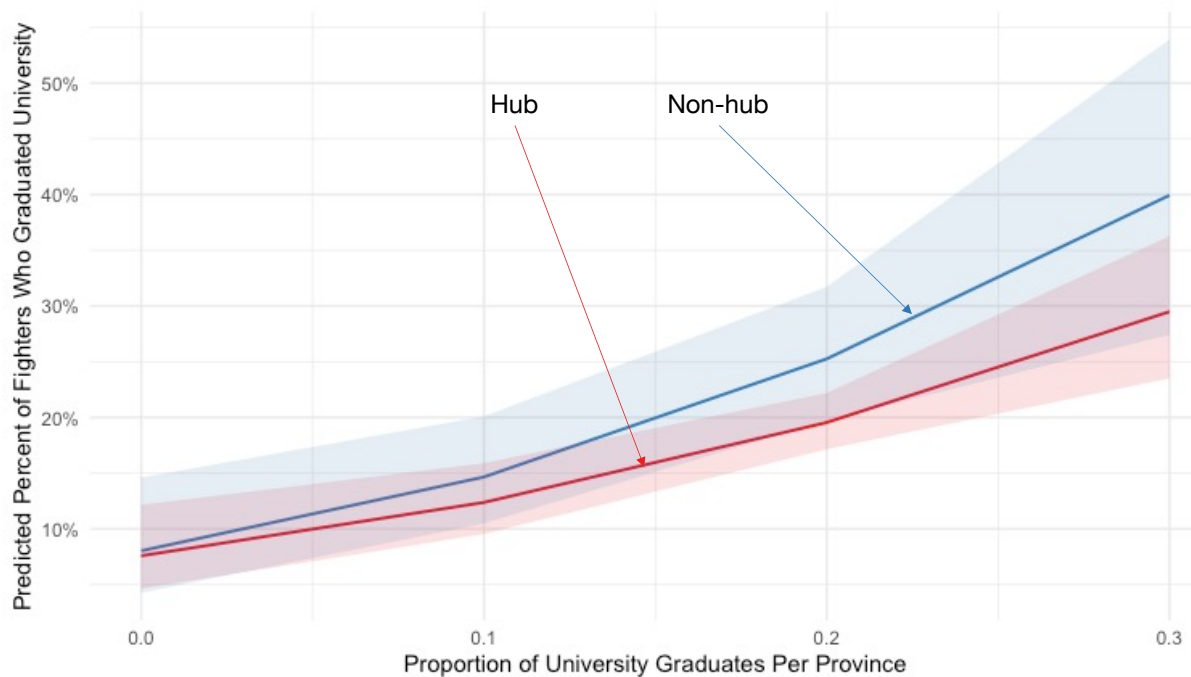
Table 4.7 shows an extremely strong and positive correlation between the university graduation rates of ISIS foreign fighters and the university graduation rates of the places fighters came from (model one).

Table 4.7 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces			
<i>Dependent variable: fighter graduated from university (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	<i>Model (1)</i>	<i>Model (2)</i>	<i>Model (3)</i>
Education			
Proportion of university graduation rates per province	0.79*** (0.15)	0.85*** (0.15)	1.08*** (0.28)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.05+ (0.03)	0.004 (0.06)
Education x Hub Interaction term			-0.33 (0.33)
Constant	0.05+ (0.03)	0.08+ (0.03)	0.05 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.39		
Adjusted R²	0.02	0.02	0.03
F Statistic	29.53***	16.32***	11.21***

*Note: + p < 0.1 * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001 (two-tailed).*

This result remained positively correlated and statistically significant through all three models, which means that contingents of ISIS foreign fighters with advanced degrees were more likely to come from places with advanced degrees. This result mirrors the previous one, where the relationship between provincial conditions and fighter traits for university graduation rates are positively correlated.

Figure 4.3 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces



Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; census data; compiled by author

Model two shows that hubs do not have a strong effect on whether a fighter received a university degree. The hub variable is slightly negative, suggesting that people from hubs are slightly less likely to be university graduates or have advanced degrees. This mirrors the descriptive statistics in Table 4.4, which showed fighters from non-hubs having a slightly higher proportion of university graduates or people with advanced degrees (20 percent to 19 percent). But this difference is not statistically significant. Finally, the lack of statistical significance of the hub as an interaction term in model three, and the graph in Figure 4.3, shows that hubs do not affect the relationship between the educational attainment of a fighter and the province they come from.

Thus far, there is minimal support for either hypothesis presented at the beginning of this section – hubs do not appear to affect the types of foreign fighters who

were recruited to ISIS. Fighters who were younger or better educated tended to come from places that were younger or better educated, their traits did not change as a result of some effect of recruitment in hubs.

Comparing Relative Wealth

This section compares the relative wealth of fighters to that of the provinces they came from. The wealth of fighters is measured by their socioeconomic score, a composite indicator of their overall wealth built from a fighters' education level, professional background, travel history, and marital status (see Chapter Three for more detail on this indicator). The wealth of provinces is measured in average monthly household expenditures, a variable more reliably collected subnationally in household expenditure and consumption surveys than in other data (i.e., GDP or GNI per capita).

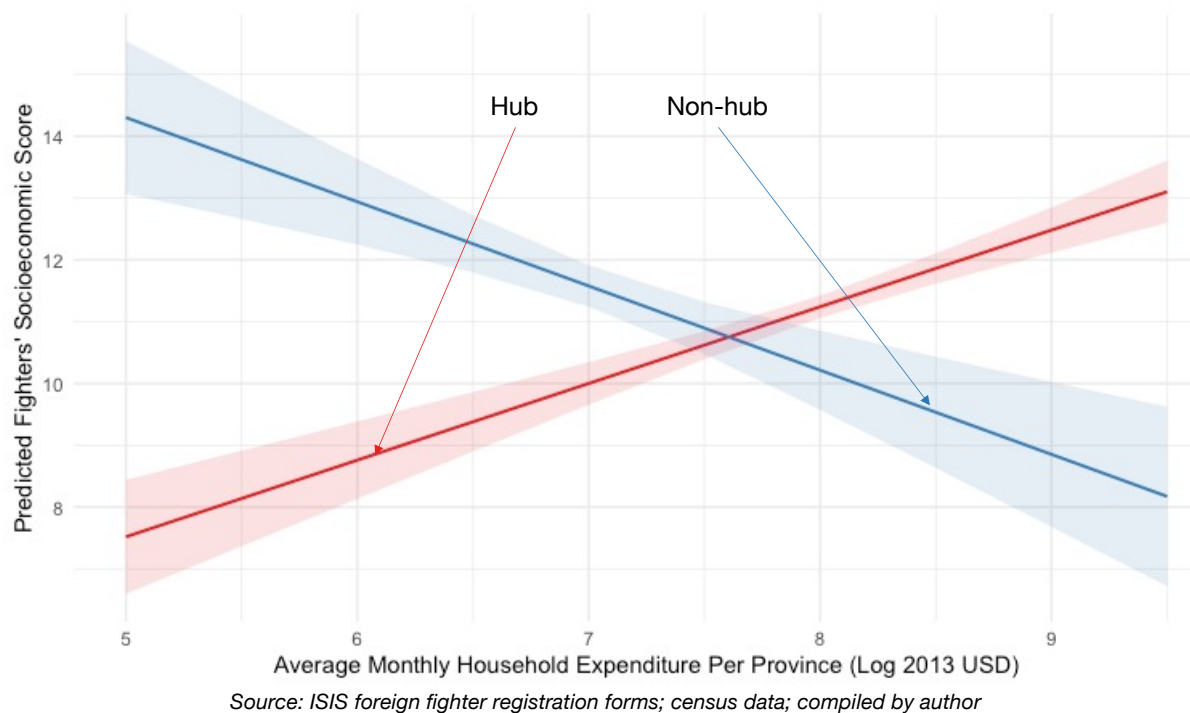
Table 4.8 Socioeconomic Status of Fighters and Wealth of Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: Fighter socioeconomic score*</i>			
	<i>Model (1)</i>	<i>Model (2)</i>	<i>Model (3)</i>
Monthly Household Expenditures			
Log household expenditures per province (2013 USD)	0.37** (0.12)	0.67*** (0.14)	-1.36*** (0.29)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.92*** (0.24)	-19.80*** (2.43)
Household Expenditure x Hub Interaction term			2.60*** (0.33)
Constant	8.36*** (0.93)	6.77*** (1.01)	21.12*** (2.09)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	3.01	2.99	2.92
Adjusted R²	0.01	0.02	0.06
F Statistic	9.84***	12.57***	29.08***

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).
*For information on fighter socioeconomic scores, see Chapter 3.1.1.

Table 4.8 shows that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between a fighters' socioeconomic score and the household expenditures of their home provinces (model one). This indicates that fighters were more likely to come from well off areas if they were themselves better off.

Figure 4.4 Socioeconomic Status of Fighters and Wealth of Provinces



That a fighters' SES and the relative wealth of their home province are correlated makes intuitive sense. The income disparities in the Arabic-speaking world are so stark that a fighter from Qatar, for example, where the GDP per capita is one of the highest in the world, should report being better off than a fighter from Tunisia, who would have to work for almost 19 years to make what an average Qatari national makes in one year. If a fighters' SES were not positively correlated with the wealth of their home provinces,

it would likely indicate there was something wrong with the calculations of the composite score more than anything else.

When controlling for hubs (model two), the relationship between fighter and province wealth indicators increases, while the hub control variable was negative. This suggests a negative relationship between the wealth of fighters and the wealth of fighters' provinces if these fighters are recruited from non-hubs. In model three, the interaction term is statistically significant and a far better model in terms of fit than the other two based on its F-statistic.

The fact that the interaction term between hubs and fighter wealth is statistically significant in model three of Table 4.8 means that the wealth of the ISIS foreign fighter contingent is likely moderated by whether or not they were recruited from hubs. In other words, something about hubs leads people who appear better off to join. This result supports the first hypothesis: that the profile of fighters changes depending on whether or not they were recruited in hubs. Furthermore, the upward sloping red curve in Figure 4.4 shows that fighters from hubs reflected the wealth of their home regions: they were more 'normal' yet still joined ISIS, which is strong support for the second hypothesis.

Comparing Unemployment Levels

Table 4.9 shows that the relationship between unemployment rates in provinces and the unemployment rates for fighters were not strongly correlated (model one). Although fighters are slightly more likely to be unemployed when recruited from a hub (model two), the most important result is the third one (model three), which shows a statistically significant and negative correlation.

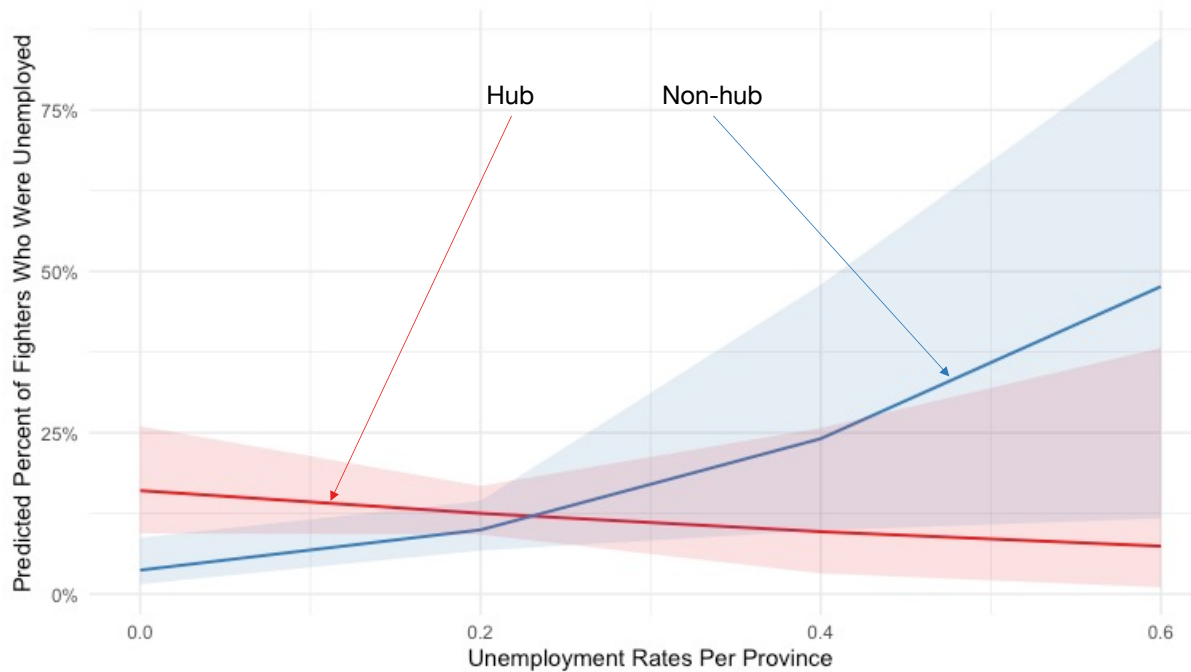
Table 4.9 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter unemployed (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	<i>Model (1)</i>	<i>Model (2)</i>	<i>Model (3)</i>
Unemployment Unemployment rate by province	0.07 (0.19)	0.16 (0.19)	0.61 ⁺ (0.29)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.05 ⁺ (0.02)	0.17 ^{**} (0.06)
Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.78 ⁺ (0.38)
Constant	0.11 ^{***} (0.03)	0.06 ⁺ (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.33		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.005	0.01
F Statistic	0.14	2.96 ⁺	3.33 [*]

Note: ⁺ p < 0.1 ^{} p < 0.05; ^{**} p < 0.01, ^{***} p < 0.001 (two-tailed).*

The negative correlation of the interaction term in model three of Table 4.9 signifies that, as the unemployment rate rose in hubs, the proportion of fighters from those places who were unemployed declined (as shown in Figure 4.5). Although fighters from hubs were more likely to be unemployed overall than fighters from non-hubs (Table 4.4 and model two of Table 4.9), their effect was moderated by hubs: they were more likely to be better off (i.e., less likely to be unemployed) if they were recruited from hubs. These results support the first hypothesis – that hubs affect the profiles of people recruited in them. But the negative trend between a fighters' predicted probability of unemployment and the unemployment rates of their home provinces suggests that this moderator effect did not change the biographies of fighters to make them reflect the conditions where they were recruited.

Figure 4.5 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces



Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; census data; compiled by author

Comparing Youth Unemployment

As with overall unemployment, Table 4.10 shows that the relationship between the youth unemployment rate of fighters and their home provinces was moderated by whether or not they were recruited from hubs.

Overall, a province that was a hub would have higher levels of youth unemployment among the fighters who were recruited to ISIS (model two in Table 4.10). However, Figure 4.6 shows that, as the youth unemployment rates in hub provinces increased, the young fighters recruited from those hubs would be less likely to be unemployed. These results reflect those in the overall unemployment rates: young fighters from hubs were less likely to be unemployed relative to their home province as compared with those recruited from non-hubs. This confirms hypothesis one – that

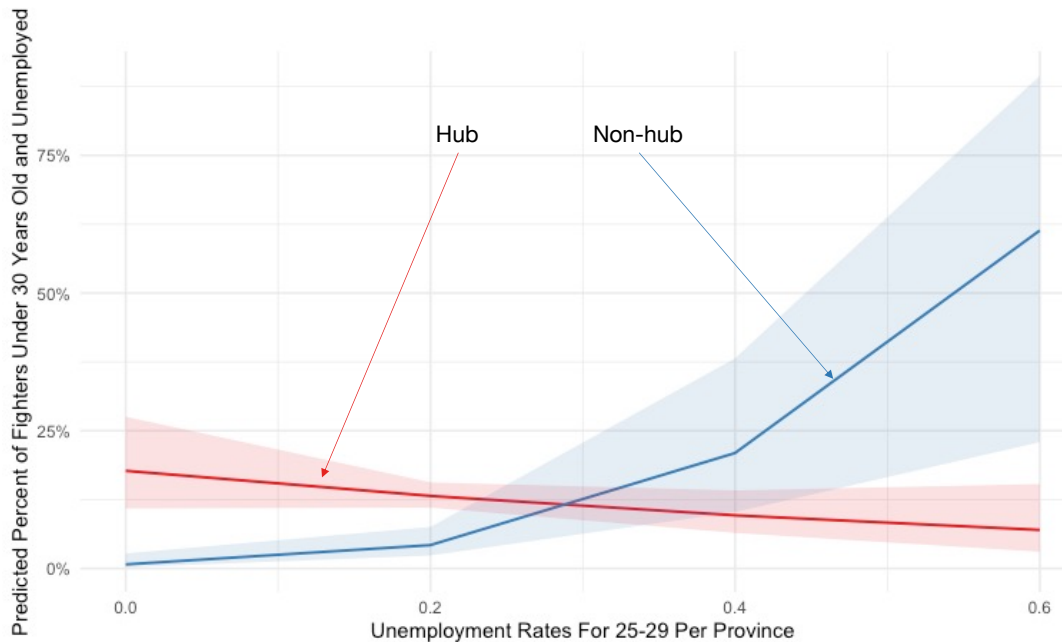
hubs moderated the relationship – but raises doubts about hypothesis two. Fighters were not reflective of their home province regarding unemployment – the worse off the province’s unemployment rate, the less likely young fighters reported being unemployed.

Table 4.10 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighters unemployed aged under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	<i>Model (1)</i>	<i>Model (2)</i>	<i>Model (3)</i>
Youth Unemployment			
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.10 (0.10)	0.01 (0.11)	0.64** (0.22)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.07*** (0.02)	0.24*** (0.05)
Youth Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.84*** (0.25)
Constant	0.08*** (0.03)	0.05+ (0.03)	-0.07 (0.04)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.31		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.01	0.02
F Statistic	1.02	6.38***	8.1***

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Figure 4.6 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces



Source: ISIS foreign fighter registration forms; census data; compiled by author

4.2.3 Preliminary conclusions on ISIS fighters and the provinces they came from

The findings from this section yield two preliminary conclusions. First, hubs appeared to have moderated the relationship between some of the biographical characteristics of fighters and socioeconomic conditions in the provinces from which they were recruited. In two out of four factors – relative wealth and unemployment status – the fact that a fighter was recruited from a hub changed that fighters' relationship with the underlying conditions where they were recruited. In the other two factors, youth and university attainment rates, being recruited from a hub did not moderate the fighter's profile. A fighter from a hub more likely to be younger and slightly less likely to graduate university than a fighter who was recruited from a non-hub province. This demonstrates, to a certain extent, that hubs may have affected foreign fighter recruitment in not just determining *how* people joined, but even affecting *who* joined.

Second, setting aside the question of whether hubs were moderators, fighters who joined from hubs were different than fighters recruited from non-hubs. Although we are limited in our ability to test these differences by available statistics, Table 4.4 showed that fighters recruited from hubs were generally younger, less likely to be married, more likely to be unemployed or have minimal gainful employment, and almost half as likely to have fought in a previous conflict as fighters who were recruited from non-hubs. The majority of ISIS fighters were recruited from hubs, and it was possible that hubs were the gateway for many new fighters to join ISIS.

Overall, the suggestive findings of Section 4.2 may have important implications for future research on foreign fighter recruitment. Not only were hubs important in determining the overall number of ISIS foreign fighters, but they may also have changed the relationship between the structural conditions commonly associated with recruitment into transnational insurgency and the biographical characteristics of the fighters themselves. The presence of hubs and their influence on the types of fighters recruited indicate that it is important to consider the local context in which a fighter is recruited when trying to build a profile of who becomes a foreign fighter.

However, the findings in this section are tempered by several limitations. The most important consideration limiting these findings is the spatial scale challenge, in that the geographic unit in question (i.e., the province) is larger than the more localized nature of recruitment itself (i.e., small towns or city neighbourhoods). This limitation makes the qualitative components of this study necessary – the qualitative fieldwork presented in subsequent chapters deepens the province level of analysis presented here with more fine-grained geographic units of analysis. Fieldwork in the neighbourhoods of Tunis that will be explored in later chapters of this dissertation help us understand in more detail the characteristics that hub provinces shared in common. For example, why foreign fighters are more likely to come from relatively wealthy provinces before they join ISIS. Ideally, future research would examine population characteristics in the smaller geographic areas where recruitment actually takes place. However, the findings in this section suggest, first, that this work is needed, and second, that future work ought to consider how the local dynamics where a fighter was recruited might affect the factors

that motivated that fighter to join an insurgency fighting in another country's civil war. If that fighter came from a place with a high concentration of recruits, for example as this dissertation argues, then their profile might be different from someone who did not.

4.3 What Factors Describe Where Hubs Emerged?

The previous two sections have made clear that foreign fighter recruitment hubs were important for ISIS's recruitment of foreign fighters. Hubs were not only sites where a disproportionately high number of fighters were recruited, but they were also places that, in some cases, moderated the relationship between the personal backgrounds of fighters and the places those fighters come from. Although these results are limited by available data, what we have observed thus far suggests that the relationship between the characteristics of ISIS foreign fighters and the socioeconomic conditions from which they emerged changed depending on whether or not the fighters came from a recruitment hub.

Now that we have established the importance of hubs, this part of Chapter Four explores why, and under what conditions, the ISIS recruitment hubs formed in certain places and not others. This section uses OLS linear regressions to determine what factors ISIS recruitment hubs have in common with one another. The presence or absence of a recruitment hub is the outcome variable of interest, and this section uses subnationally representative surveys from all 17 countries in the Arabic-speaking world as explanatory variables.

4.3.1 Where Hubs Might Form from Existing Literature

This section outlines four hypotheses from existing academic research on conflict that might help explain where ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs emerged in 2013-14. This is not a predictive analysis for where hubs may form in the future, but rather an attempt to make sense of the common factors involved in hubs forming for the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization in order to test extant literature explored in Chapter Two. First, Tilly (1971) and other scholars (i.e., McAdam et al., 2001; Meyer, 2004) have emphasized the importance of a political opportunity for the emergence of a wide variety of contentious political movements. Building on Tilly and others, a substantial body of academic research has shown that these openings also give rise to insurgents that use terrorism (Brooks, 2009; Sánchez-Cuenca and Aguilar, 2009; Chenoweth, 2010; Bakker et al., 2016). Many scholars explaining the rise of ISIS and the reason it was able to attract tens of thousands of fighters from the MENA region was a result of changes in government caused by the Arab Spring (i.e., Malka and Balboni, 2016; Jacob, 2017). These political transformations, they argue, created the chaotic conditions that allowed for foreign fighters to emerge. This hypothesis tests this argument by examining whether ISIS hubs were more common in countries that experienced political transformations (i.e., Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen). Related to the political opening caused by these revolutions, scholars have also emphasized the importance of youth bulges (Urdal, 2006) and the Internet (Lynch, 2007) as forces for political change in the region. Others connected these two factors as direct causes of the 2010-11 Arab Spring protests (i.e.,

LaGrafte, 2012; Howard et al., 2015). These factors – youth bulges and Internet access rates – will also be included in the political transformations model.

Hypothesis 1: Countries that experienced political transformations during the Arab Spring are more likely to have provinces with high rates of foreign fighters.

Second, Huntington introduced the idea that social change would result in political transformations like rebellion, revolution, and protest (1968). Traditional relationships of kinship, ethnicity, and religion, Huntington argued, would be replaced by new political forces (i.e., based on occupation, class, or ideology) due to modernization and industrialization. This transformation would result in social dislocation and new claimants to political power, a transition that would result in a higher likelihood of contention – particularly in parts of countries experiencing rapid population growth and urbanization. Moghadam, meanwhile, advanced a feminist case for women's empowerment as a crucial engine of social change. Traditional structures of political and social power, Moghadam argued, "have been undermined by sociodemographic changes such as women's educational attainment and challenged by civil society organizations and new social movements focused on human rights, women's rights, and democracy" (2013, 17). Durkheim's study of suicides as a result of unstable social conditions provides underlying theory to this discussion as well (1952). This second hypothesis would therefore expect provinces that become ISIS recruitment hubs to have experienced demographic shifts such as population growth or female economic empowerment, holding constant the rate of population per province living in cities.

Hypothesis 2: Provinces with high rates population growth, measured over multiple periods in time, are likely to have higher rates of foreign fighters.

Third, as mentioned in Chapter Two, grievance factors like relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970) would support a hypothesis where unemployment, particularly high unemployment rates among aspiring young job seekers (i.e., people in their late 20s) or among those with university degrees, would result in high rates of foreign fighter recruitment. Regions with high unemployment, therefore, would best characterize the types of places where hubs are likely to emerge. Grievance factors were also the conclusion of one of the few quantitative studies using subnational data to explain the origins of ISIS foreign fighters. That study found that a one percent increase in a country's unemployment rate would result in 42 more ISIS foreign fighters (Abdel Jelil et al., 2018), although this finding did not apply to several countries in the Maghrib or Western Europe since the predictive power of this finding diminished for countries further away from Syria. Nevertheless, its findings were robust in many countries of the Arabic-speaking world and are tested here.

Hypothesis 3: ISIS foreign fighters will concentrate in provinces that have high rates of unemployment, particularly among youth and/or university graduates.

A fourth hypothesis explaining where ISIS foreign fighter hubs formed would expect concentrations in regions with low GDP per capita, large populations, and high population growth rates (Collier and Hoeffler, 2003). Somewhat contradicting these

results, however, is research on transnational insurgency and terrorism that has found the opposite: insurgents in these cases are not recruited from the poorest segments of society; they are instead concentrated in wealthier areas. This hypothesis is supported by past academic literature that mainly focuses on insurgent groups labelled as terrorist organizations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah (i.e., in Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; Krueger, 2008). In these studies, as well as others (i.e., Lee, 2011), there is a slightly positive correlation between recruits and incomes at the individual and country level. Another quantitative study focused on the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization found a positive relationship between a country's GDP per capita and its likelihood of having high per capita rates of citizens among the ISIS fighters (Benmelech and Klor, 2018).

Hypothesis 4: ISIS foreign fighters will concentrate in provinces with higher rates of monthly household spending, controlling for GDP per capita.

The next two sections will test each hypothesis independently before combining them to test which best explains the characteristics that hubs share in common with one another.

4.3.2 Testing Hypotheses Independently

This section tests the four different hypotheses outlined in the last section to determine which explanation best describes where ISIS foreign fighter hubs emerged. It uses OLS linear regressions, with the presence or absence of a hub as the outcome variable of interest and various subnationally representative socioeconomic and demographic data as explanatory variables. As with the Section 4.2, I use OLS models

here for preference to ease of interpretation. Logistic model results are available in Appendix K.

This section tests each hypothesis independently in order to eliminate explanations that do not apply to where recruitment hubs emerged. Section 4.3.3 compares the remaining potential explanations by combining them into new models. Each model controls for the distance of each province from Syria in order to hold constant the presumed cost of one fighter reaching their destination. It also controls for the size of the provincial population, in order to hold constant potential effects larger regions might have on explanatory variables of interest.

Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge – Independent Tests

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		0.14*			
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		(0.08)			
Youth		-0.03**			
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		(0.01)			
Internet Access		0.01***			
Internet penetration rates per province		(0.002)			
Women in Workforce			0.01***		
Proportion of women in the labour force			(0.003)		
Urban Population			0.00		
Proportion of population living in urban areas			(0.001)		
Population Growth			-0.01*		
Annualized population growth over two periods			(0.01)		
Youth Unemployment				0.003	
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				(0.004)	
Higher Ed. Unemp.				0.02***	
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				(0.003)	
Monthly HH Expend.					0.20***
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					(0.04)
GDP Per Capita					-0.02
Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					(0.04)
Distance to Syria	-0.06	0.11**	-0.06	-0.04	-0.09*
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Province Population	-0.02	0.01	0.04	-0.01	0.04*
Log of population per province	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	0.96**	-0.35	-0.09	0.31	-0.99
	(0.45)	(0.70)	(0.59)	(0.40)	(0.63)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Adjusted R²	0.004	0.13	0.10	0.25	0.15
Residual SE	0.41	0.38	0.39	0.36	0.38
F Statistic	1.40	7.12***	5.32***	18.09***	9.57***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Hypothesis 1 – Political Opportunity and ISIS Foreign Fighter Hubs

Did ISIS foreign fighter hubs emerge in regions of countries that experienced a political transition? Four countries experienced a political transition from 2010 to the years 2013 and 2014 that ISIS hubs emerged: Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. At first glance, this hypothesis seems compelling: more than half of the hubs in the Arabic-speaking world come from these four countries (23 in 45). And, as Table 4.11 shows, there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between provinces in countries that experienced a political transition and provinces that became hubs. The coefficient of $\beta = 0.14$ associated with the political transformation variable in Table 4.10 means that a province in a country that experienced a regime transformation during the Arab Spring was 14 percent more likely to have become an ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hub, holding constant the distance of that province to Syria, the size of that province, the proportion of the province's population aged 15-29, and the rate of local Internet access. This finding suggests that a political opportunity was key for a hub to form, although it relies on results from Tunisia to be statistically significant (see Appendix I). This mixed result indicates there is nuance to our understanding of the effect of the Arab Spring on ISIS recruitment. Some countries with many fighters or hubs did not experience any political transformation (i.e., Morocco, Saudi Arabia), just as others did (i.e., Tunisia, Libya).

One surprising finding is that provinces that were more youthful appear to be negatively correlated with where recruitment hubs formed. This seems to contradict the previous section, which found that fighters reflect the conditions where they were

recruited, and that, to a certain extent, hubs are places where young fighters tend to join. Here, Table 4.11 shows that *provinces* with younger proportions of fighters did not necessarily result in a hub forming. That means that hubs are places where fighters are younger, but not necessarily in places where the overall population is younger. This distinction usefully illustrates the different tests pursued in this chapter in terms of the relationship between fighter traits, province characteristics, and the emergence of a hub. Overall, it highlights that hubs were not necessarily places with large numbers of young people, but being from a hub slightly increased the chances of a young person being recruited to join ISIS. Finally, the Internet appears to play an important role in the recruitment of many ISIS fighters. This appears to confirm many studies which emphasize the importance of the Internet on ISIS recruitment (i.e., Berger and Stern, 2015). A one percent increase in Internet penetration rates increased a province's chance of becoming a hub equally by one percent. However, later chapters in this dissertation challenge that conclusion: few recruits in the hub studied in depth in this dissertation were recruited online, although material online may have deepened their indoctrination. Instead, Internet access rates may be a proxy for a country or province's wealth, with wealthier countries having greater Internet access than poorer ones.

Hypothesis 2 - Social Change and ISIS Foreign Fighter Hubs

Did hubs emerge in regions characterized by rapid demographic shifts, such as rising population growth? Table 4.11 shows a slightly negative correlation between population growth and the propensity of that region to become a hub of recruitment.

This means provinces with slower population growth rates were slightly more likely to have been recruitment hubs than those with fast growing populations.¹⁰ I included as references the proportion of the population living in urban areas and the proportion of women in the labour force as additional potential indicators of social change, and these also are limited in describing where ISIS hubs emerged.¹¹ There does appear to be a slight positive relationship between the proportion of women in the workforce and the likelihood of a province becoming a hub, but that relationship is obviated in the robustness checks when controlling for Tunisia. Tunisia had 18 out of the 45 hubs and a more progressive workforce than many countries in the Arabic-speaking world, and that coefficient for women in the workforce is mainly driven by the Tunisia effect. This model also had the lowest significance scores of the four, shown in the adjusted r^2 and f-statistic. Overall, model three in Table 4.11 does not appear to support a theory of social change explaining where ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs were likely to emerge. As Tilly argued, social change is “not the tinder of revolutions” (1973, p.433), but as later chapters will explain, this may be because there is a much longer process of social transformation, and many intervening variables that ultimately lead to contentious political action.

¹⁰ Population growth was calculated by annualizing growth over two periods of time, with the latter period selected for being as close as possible to 2013-14. See Appendix G for the time periods calculated for each country.

¹¹ Female labour market participation rates and proportion of provincial populations living in cities were cross-sectional variables, measuring a snapshot in time as close as possible to 2013-14. For more information on these variables, see Appendix E; for sources, see Appendix G.

Hypothesis 3 - Grievances and ISIS Foreign Fighter Hubs

How did higher rates of unemployment affect which provinces became recruitment hubs? The variables shown here (youth unemployment for job seekers aged 25-29; unemployment rates among university graduates) were selected after testing and removing unemployment rates for all residents and unemployment rates among young residents aged 20-24 due to high multicollinearity. I test these two variables in this section – unemployment rates among 25-29-year-olds and unemployment rates among college graduates – because they were the variables of greatest interest to the question of relative deprivation. Young people in the job market in their late 20s and university graduates have expectations about a career that, if unmet, are examples of aspirational deprivation – in which expectations rise against a static reality (Gurr, 1970). The results in Table 4.11 show that youth unemployment rates by province do not meaningfully predict where a hub may emerge. But the unemployment rate among university graduates does: a one percent increase in the unemployment rate of university graduates in a province results in a two percent increase in the likelihood of that province having become an ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hub.

That university-educated and unemployed persons proves an important factor in describing where ISIS foreign fighter hubs emerged is robust to various tests (see Appendix H and I). It is also consistent across multiple studies focused particularly on transnational insurgent participation, including other studies focused on the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization in Tunisia (Brennan and de Corral, 2018) and elsewhere (Macdonald and Waggoner, 2018; Abdel Jelil et al., 2018). It appears as though the narrative of

grievances does support where hubs of ISIS recruitment emerged. Although the university-educated unemployment rate is the only variable that was statistically significant in this model, the model overall had by far the highest adjusted r^2 , suggesting the model overall best described where recruitment hubs formed.

Hypothesis 4 - Wealth and ISIS Foreign Fighter Hubs

Did hubs of recruitment emerge in poorer or wealthier areas? The results in Table 4.11 seem to contradict the so-called “greed” theory of rebel recruitment and conflict onset (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The findings in Table 4.11 also provide further evidence to support research contending that fighters join from wealthier areas (Krueger, 2008; Benmelech and Klor, 2018). For example, for every ten percent increase in monthly household expenditures in a given province, the likelihood that province became an ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hub increased by 20 percent. This was true even when holding GDP per capita constant in the province (although the coefficient for GDP was negative in this model, this is likely due to contrary effects caused by the presence of the household expenditure variable). Results in this model would contradict the “greed” theory as a meaningful driver of foreign fighter recruitment in the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization. Instead, these results support research that has shown a modestly positive correlation between wealth and propensity to participate in insurgency.

4.3.3 Competing Explanations of Where Hubs Form

Three out of the four explanations for where hubs may emerge had some support in the previous section. It does not seem like the social change theory holds up to

scrutiny – in fact, the opposite seems to be true in that regions with declining rates of population growth appear to have had more ISIS foreign fighter hubs emerge. Meanwhile, theories on political opportunity, grievance, and wealth remain relevant. This section compares each theory to the other and combines all three together to assess what theory or combination of theories best describes what ISIS recruitment hubs have in common.

Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.18*** (0.06)	0.13** (0.06)		0.18*** (0.06)
Youth Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)		-0.02** (0.01)
Internet Access Internet penetration rates per province	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004** (0.002)		0.004** (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp. Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.02*** (0.002)		0.01*** (0.003)	0.01*** (0.003)
Monthly HH Expend. Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.12*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)
Population Growth Annualized population growth over two periods		-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Distance to Syria Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	0.03 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.09** (0.04)	-0.002 (0.05)
Province Population Log of population per province	0.01 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Constant	-0.17 (0.54)	-0.53 (0.62)	-0.39 (0.52)	-0.42 (0.58)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Adjusted R²	0.33	0.25	0.29	0.35
Residual SE	0.33	0.35	0.34	0.32
F Statistic	19.31***	11.24***	19.37***	15.72***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Table 4.12 shows the results when combining these different hypotheses. Model one combines the wealth and unemployment hypotheses. A strong test of the relative deprivation theory (Gurr 1970), this column would test to what extent high unemployment in areas that are relatively well-off best explains where hubs form. Model two tests whether a political opportunity combined with grievance factors would be most likely to lead to ISIS recruitment hubs forming. This would combine grievance theories with those that argue a political opportunity is also required (e.g., Tilly, 1971; McAdam et al., 2001; Meyer, 2004). Model three tests whether political opportunity makes more salient the phenomenon Krueger and Maleckova (2003) and Benmelech and Klor (2018) observed between wealth factors and recruitment. Finally, model four combines all three models – opportunity, grievance, and wealth – to determine whether ISIS recruitment hubs were best explained not only in areas that experienced political transformations due to the Arab Spring, but also that had high levels of wealth *and* grievance.

There are three results to highlight from Table 4.12. The first and most important is that the combination of all three theories – opportunity, wealth, and grievance – was the model that appears to have best described where ISIS recruitment hubs formed. This is model four, which had the highest adjusted r^2 of the other models. It also finds that provinces that would become hubs were most likely 1) in countries that experienced a change in government during the Arab Spring, and 2) had high rates of unemployed university graduates despite 3) relatively high levels of wealth relative to the overall Arabic-speaking world. These were also provinces with declining population sizes – not

negative population growth (signifying out-migration), but low population growth and higher-than-average Internet penetration rates (proxies for wealthy provinces or countries). These factors of opportunity, grievance, and wealth hold regardless of the distance of the province from Syria or the size of the province's population. It suggests that no single theory solely best describes where a hub of ISIS foreign fighter recruits formed. Instead, the aggregation of multiple effects – declining population growth rates, high rates of university unemployment despite the relative wealth of the province, a political opportunity – best describes where a hub formed.

Nevertheless, it is the case that some theories provide better explanations than others. The second result to highlight is that unemployment rates among university graduates was one of the consistently most relevant factors that ISIS recruitment hubs had in common. Unemployment rates among university graduates remains positively correlated with the likelihood of a hub forming on its own or when combined with wealth indicators or political transformations. Models one, two, and four of Table 4.12 show that an approximately one percent increase in unemployment among university graduates resulted in a one to two percent increase in the likelihood of a hub of ISIS foreign fighters forming. This meso-level finding about the conditions in a province are consistent with the results of many studies which find a “blocked ambition” effect playing an important role in individual motivations (i.e., Nielsen, 2017; Gambetta and Hertog, 2016) and at a country level (Abdel Jelil et al., 2018). Later chapters will show that university-educated unemployed persons may be a proxy for a wider range of

discriminatory policies aimed at people from a certain area, in addition to an individual-level mechanism motivating participation.

Third, the results suggest that ISIS is not recruiting foreign fighters in large numbers from poor, rapidly growing provinces. Instead, results from multiple factors in the models above show that foreign fighting is more likely to occur in relatively wealthy provinces. There is a consistently positive and significant correlation between hubs forming and monthly household spending, indicating wealth and access to key services like the Internet. These provinces also reflect demographic trends of more developed countries, with a negative relationship between population growth rates and the likelihood of a hub forming – for example, the average population growth rate for the Middle East is 2.5 percent, while those in hubs were 1.7 percent. Only one hub in 52 provinces formed in the three poorest countries of the Arabic-speaking world as measured by per capita GDP (Mauritania, Yemen, and Sudan). But there were 21 hubs in 71 provinces in the seven wealthiest countries of the Arabic-speaking world (Saudi Arabia, Libya, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, and Oman). In sum, hubs may have formed where there were large numbers of people in wealthy countries who were not finding pathways to economic mobility and where a political opportunity emerged that gave a new social movement the chance to emerge and re-order local politics in certain localities.

4.4. What Characterizes Hubs of Foreign Fighter Recruitment?

There were two goals in this chapter. First, to highlight the importance of hubs on foreign fighter recruitment. Collectively, the vast majority of ISIS foreign fighters in the Arabic-speaking world were recruited in hubs. Moreover, the profile of fighters recruited from hubs were different than those recruited elsewhere: they were more likely to be new recruits, rather than battle-hardened from previous conflicts. Finally, hubs appeared to moderate the structural conditions normally associated with militancy and the socioeconomic profiles of the people who were recruited as ISIS foreign fighters. Not only were the fighters recruited from hubs distinct from those who joined in non-hubs, but also the extent to which they were similar or different from their home provinces appears moderated by whether or not they were recruited from a hub. The first part of this chapter demonstrated that hubs were crucial not just because they affected how many people joined ISIS, but also because they changed the types of people who joined ISIS.

Second, having demonstrated the importance of hubs, this chapter also set out to identify the socioeconomic characteristics that ISIS recruitment hubs shared in common. It found that ISIS recruitment hubs were more likely to emerge in wealthier provinces across the Arabic-speaking world with higher-than-average rates of unemployment among university graduates, lower population growth rates, and in places with greater access to the internet. These factors underscore the importance of combining theories, rather than relying on a single explanation, in understanding foreign fighter recruitment.

One possible mechanism for these findings is that foreign fighting requires more resources to participate than a domestic insurgency. To join an insurgent group abroad, one must have the financial resources to travel overseas, the social capital to arrange that travel safely, and the time to become indoctrinated into the beliefs lead one to decide to fight abroad. From fieldwork on the ISIS foreign fighter recruitment process (explored more in detail in Chapter Seven), it was apparent that local recruiters facilitated the interpersonal connections necessary to make the trip safely, but the fighters mostly funded the trip themselves. Thus, fighters needed to have access to relatively larger resources of money, connections, and time to join. These resources are more likely to be in areas with relatively higher levels of income, which may explain why this particular finding – that hubs emerged more in wealthier areas than poorer ones – is so robust. Yet, as Lee and other have shown, the high rates of unemployment among university graduates suggests that some grievance factor also plays a crucial role (2011).

In terms of where hubs form, this chapter contributes additional evidence to confirm previous studies connecting wealth and unemployment to foreign fighter and/or terrorist recruitment. Several previous studies found a positive correlation between wealth indicators and the likelihood that a hub will form (i.e., Krueger, 2008; Benmelech and Klor, 2018). The results from this chapter also support findings from previous studies connecting terrorism and foreign fighter recruitment rates to rates of unemployment (i.e., Abdel Jelil et al., 2018). Although this chapter confirms the findings of these previous studies, it also provides two novel contributions.

First, this study emphasizes the importance of studying the characteristics of regions where hubs of foreign fighter recruitment may emerge. For the ISIS mobilization, these hubs appear to have an outsized impact on foreign fighter recruitment. Approximately 11 percent of the population of the Arabic-speaking world lived in provinces where almost 75 percent of ISIS foreign fighter recruits originated. Because so many fighters came from so few places, we must try to understand the conditions in these areas in order to better understand how their recruitment took place. This approach is particularly useful because the knowledge is actionable. Whereas previous research uncovered correlations that are statistically significant, their usefulness in practical terms is limited. For example, Abdel Jelil et al. (2018) found that a one percent increase in the unemployment rate countries in the Middle East resulted in 42 more fighters recruited to ISIS. While it is interesting to probe the relationship between unemployment and foreign fighting, this finding is too blunt an instrument. Countries that experience this effect have populations ranging from 4 million (Lebanon) to 80 million (Egypt). This means that a one percent rise in unemployment leads to an increase in possible ISIS fighters of one in 10,000 persons (Lebanon) to one in 200,000 persons (Egypt). Based on these figures, it is unreasonable to expect the government in Beirut or Cairo to address potentially rising unemployment rates out of the concern that one person in 10,000 or 200,000 might join a terrorist group or foreign insurgency. A focus on hubs gives people a chance to develop more fine-tuned instruments that focus on addressing the structural factors that relate to foreign fighter recruitment specifically in the places where recruitment is most prevalent.

The second contribution of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of situational factors involved in recruitment. Local context where fighters are recruited matters to the types of fighters being recruited. Some quantitative research on individual factors draws a straight line between structural factors and the outcome of interest – in this case militancy. That fighters appeared so different depending on whether or not they were recruited from hubs means that studies that compare effects at macro levels (i.e., using countries as units of analysis), or that aggregate large amounts of individual-level data based on the conditions of their recruitment, should consider refining their approach in order to better understand where fighters are recruited and the interaction of people and place in foreign fighter recruitment.

CHAPTER 5 | Douar Hicher - Part I

The Foreign Fighter Hub: How Did it Form?

“Our image is not tarnished in the eyes of people who take the trouble to know us closely and to avoid prejudice. It is easy to blame people, but the hardest part is getting to know them.”

- Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, Leader of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia, March 2012.
(as cited in Gamra, 2012)

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first analyses how certain conditions in Douar Hicher, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city of Tunis, Tunisia contributed to Salafi-Jihadis taking over the neighbourhood after the country's 2010-11 revolution. The second part of this chapter will describe how Salafi-Jihadis first emerged in Douar Hicher, how they organized, and by what methods they eventually took over the neighbourhood. Later in the dissertation, in Chapter Seven, I will discuss how these Salafi-Jihadis transformed from a social movement to a group that helped recruit foreign fighters to ISIS. The findings of this chapter advance the argument of this dissertation in two ways: first, they contribute additional structural factors to those included in Chapter Four on how hubs form. Second, they describe the process by which hubs form once there was an opportunity for them to do so.

The first part of Chapter Five describes two conditions present in Douar Hicher before Tunisia's 2010-11 revolution that made it vulnerable to being transformed into a hub of Salafi-Jihadism. The first was that there were limited forms of social hierarchy. This was a long term effect of social change, as rural-urban migration and the relocation

of urban poor starting in the 1970s created a housing crisis in Tunis that the state resolved by forcing migrants to live in quickly developing neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city. These neighbourhoods, like Douar Hicher, grew quickly and without state planning for decades, resulting in overpopulated areas with limited public services. In these rapidly changing circumstances, residents struggled to transition to city life. Although population growth has slowed in the past decade, the cumulative effect of previous decades of migration into Douar Hicher from across Tunisia was that the neighbourhood had limited informal social hierarchy (i.e., tribal, professional, consanguineal) that could resolve local disputes in the absence of state authority. This meant that a power vacuum emerged in Douar Hicher when law enforcement withdrew after Tunisia's revolution.

The second condition in Douar Hicher that contributed to its transformation into a hub was its isolation. This isolation was social, political, and especially economic. Douar Hicher is one of the largest concentrations of informal economic activity in all of Tunisia because its residents are discriminated against finding gainful employment in Tunisia's crony-capitalist economic system (Hibou, 2011), and faced a high cost of entry into formal employment (OECD, 2018). As a result, many in Douar Hicher work in Tunisia's vast informal economy (i.e., as unlicensed vendors, temporary or term-limited employees lacking state benefits, traders in smuggled commodities). As a result of their discrimination from formal work and their reputation for living in a high crime area, residents in Douar Hicher mainly experienced the state before the revolution through its law enforcement. These experiences have instilled in residents an anti-establishment

culture that found Salafi-Jihadis' anti-normative ideology and preference for violence appealing when it emerged after the revolution.

The second part of Chapter Five describes one additional contributing factor to explain where hubs emerged: opportunity. Douar Hicher's limited social hierarchy and social, political, and economic isolation also needed Tunisia's revolution to provide the necessary political opportunity for Salafi-Jihadis to emerge and take over Douar Hicher. After Tunisia's 2010-11 revolution, the state may have been more politically legitimate than its authoritarian predecessor but was it temporarily much less effective at policing. It took several years to get the security services fully under government control again after the revolution (Jebnoun, 2017).

By the end of 2011, Salafi-Jihadis emerged in Douar Hicher, took over the neighbourhood, and used this control to ramp up recruitment. Salafi-Jihadism first emerged among small, disconnected groups of residents who wanted to study religion. These disconnected study groups joined with Salafi-Jihadi ideologues who had returned from exile and a core group of people who had been arrested on terrorism charges in the mid-2000s and were released from prison following a general amnesty by a post-revolutionary government in its first weeks in power. These three groups – curious youth, returned exiles, and ex-convicts – formed the backbone of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST), a Salafi-Jihadi group that connected local study groups based on a shared political mission. With AST's encouragement, and as part of a nationwide grassroots movement, Douar Hicher's Salafi-Jihadis organized proselytization activities and religious instruction that expanded and formalized the group into a political organization.

The second part of this chapter describes how these proselytization efforts helped Salafi-Jihadis take over Douar Hicher's mosques and streets. By capturing the mosques, Salafi-Jihadis controlled key centres of organization in the community. By capturing the streets, Salafi-Jihadis put themselves in charge of policing, making people rely on them for their safety. In so doing, Salafi-Jihadis transformed Douar Hicher into a hub for recruitment into their political organization, initiating a process of indoctrination and socialization that would, as Chapter Seven outlines, eventually lead many to join ISIS in Syria.

5.1 Conditions in Douar Hicher Before Tunisia's Revolution

Douar Hicher's social history contributed to its limited forms of social hierarchy and social, political, and economic isolation. Douar Hicher's conditions have been examined by several studies focused on Tunisia's marginalized peri-urban areas (i.e., Micaud, 1978; Chabbi and Abid, 2008; Frische, 2015; World Bank, 2003; Meddeb, 2015), including two ethnographic studies (Hajj Salem, 2014; Lamloum and Zina, 2015). There also were two surveys of youth in Douar Hicher - one survey included a purposive sampling of 318 individuals from Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen (International Alert, 2015), and a second survey focused on 688 youth from Douar Hicher, also conducted as a purposive sample (Youth Without Borders, 2017). This study will rely on this previous research, which described Douar Hicher in great detail, but did not connect those conditions to what made the neighbourhood particularly vulnerable to transformation into a hub of foreign fighter recruitment. This section will show how these

conditions contributed to Douar Hicher becoming one of the largest concentrations of ISIS foreign fighters from Tunisia.

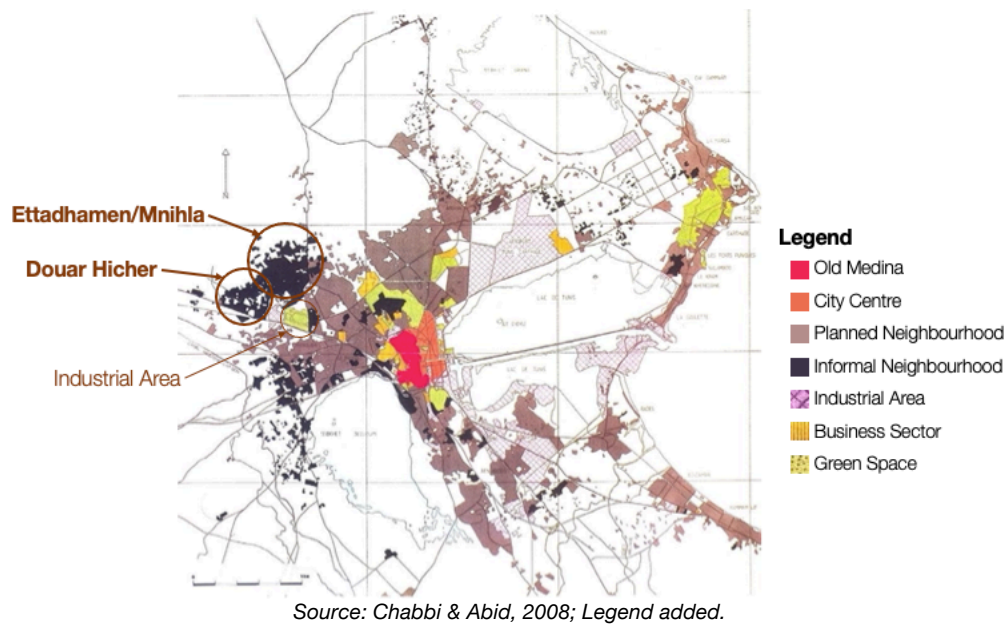
5.1.1 Douar Hicher's Limited Social Hierarchy

The key reason for Douar Hicher's limited forms of social hierarchy was the accumulated effect of decades of rapid rural-urban migration and urban dislocation from people across Tunisia moving to Douar Hicher over a short period of time. In four decades, Douar Hicher grew to forty times its original size: from 7,000 in 1975 to 280,338 in 2014 (Stambouli, 1990; INS, 2014). People moved to Douar Hicher with different personal backgrounds (i.e., tribal or familial), which meant not only that they spoke in different dialects but also had different traditions (i.e., for resolving disputes). Douar Hicher also grew with minimal state planning or municipal governance, and still today remains one of the cheapest ways for residents to reach Greater Tunis from the underdeveloped interior (Hanin, June 10, 2019; Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). This constant influx of residents from different parts of Tunisia not only made Douar Hicher one of the most overpopulated regions in Tunisia, it also filled neighbourhoods with newcomers, making it difficult to develop local, non-state alternative methods of governance. Growth slowed starting 2004, but that did not allow enough time to develop a community structure by the time of Tunisia's revolution six years later.

The starting point for analysing Douar Hicher's growth is the rapid rise of Tunisia's cities, which was driven by two forces from the 1960s until the late 1990s (Jelili and Mzali, 1998; Amara and Jemmali, 2018). The first is that many residents of the old

quarters of downtown Tunis were forced to leave through successive modernisation efforts in the 1970s (Dahmani, 2012). These residents were urban poor – some were historical city dwellers, but most were recent rural migrants who moved into central parts of Tunis several decades earlier. Both were later forced to relocate outside the city to neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher (Omar, June 10, 2019). The second force behind the rapid growth of Douar Hicher was rural-urban migration, mainly people who were motivated by finding salaried work in factories and gaining greater access to basic services like health care, education, and other infrastructure (Jelili and Mzali, 1998; Amara and Jemmali, 2018).

Figure 5.1 Map of Population Growth in Greater Tunis, 1985



In 1975, Douar Hicher essentially did not yet exist. It was part of an informal settlement outside the city of Tunis called Ettadhamen-Mnihla, where approximately 7,000 people lived (Stambouli, 1990). At that point, rural-urban migration moved to

Ettadhamen-Mnihla following the development of a small industrial park near the area (see Figure 5.1 above).

In September 1984, as part of an effort to manage these rapidly growing territories, Tunisia created the Ettadhamen-Douar Hicher Municipality (Frische, 2015). By that point, the area had grown from 7,000 to 65,000 people. From 1984 to 1994, the population of the joint municipality of Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher doubled once again (International Alert, 2015). As is clear from Figure 5.1, even by the 1980s, this area had already become informal settlement in Tunis.

In 2001, the state separated Douar Hicher from Ettadhamen because the two regions had grown to approximately 210,000 residents and were too large to administer jointly (World Bank, 2003). Although Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen became separate delegations by 2001, socially they are indistinguishable (Hanin, February 20, 2019). One decade later, by the Tunisian revolution, Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen were two of Greater Tunis' largest and most poorly planned lower-class neighbourhoods (INS, 2014). According to Tunisia's 2014 census, Douar Hicher's population is 84,090, although informal estimates believe that number is over 100,000 people (Luck, 2018). That same 2014 census counts the original land area of Ettadhamen-Mnihla, now separate regions, as having 280,338 people (INS, 2014).

Some internal migrants are still moving to Douar Hicher, but the overall rural-urban migration in Tunisia has declined in the past 15 years. From 2004-14, Douar Hicher had approximately the same population growth rate as Greater Tunis on average (1.6 percent annually). This slowing growth rate is in part due to declining household

sizes in Douar Hicher and in part due to large numbers of people leaving Douar Hicher. Once accounting for these figures, most of Douar Hicher's population growth still comes from incoming migrants. Douar Hicher represents 45 percent of the net migration into Manouba province, while Douar Hicher is only 22 percent of the province's population (INS, 2014). This is because Douar Hicher remains one of the cheapest ways for people to move to Greater Tunis (Amara et al., 2018). Prospective residents can purchase a small piece of land for as little as 500 millimes per square meter, or £0.01 per square foot (Hanin, June 10, 2019). Prospective residents can also rent a home very cheaply, sometimes free, provided the tenant is willing to work for the landlord (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). So although rural-urban migration has slowed in the past 15 years, it is the main reason Douar Hicher is still growing today.

5.1.2 Douar Hicher's Limited Social Hierarchy - Observations

Figure 5.1 showed that Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen were already some of the largest concentrations of informal settlements in Greater Tunis by the 1980s. Douar Hicher remains today one of the largest concentrations of informal settlements in Greater Tunis. Statistics about Douar Hicher from the 2014 census indicate that over 80 percent of the owned homes in the area are "self-built," far above one standard deviation more than the average proportion of self-built homes in neighbourhoods of Greater Tunis (55 percent). Self-built homes mean that residents purchased the land and then self-financed the construction of their home. Self-built homes are one of the best indicators of informality in Tunisia, because these homes are the least likely to be

built with proper permits or according to code (INS, 2014). Figure 5.2 below shows an example of several self-built additions to homes in the foreground, with the al-Nasr mosque in the background. As Chapter Seven will explain in more detail, the al-Nasr mosque was one of two main recruitment centres in Douar Hicher.

Figure 5.2 Self-Built Homes in Douar Hicher



Source: photo taken by author on June 26, 2019.

There are few, informal local institutions (i.e., civic associations or extended family networks) in Douar Hicher that can help residents adjust to city life or as an informal way to resolve disputes in lieu of the state. One example of unresolved social conflict, and a proxy for limited forms of social hierarchy, is the ongoing tension within family units. Many families struggle with shifting gender roles when they move to Douar Hicher. In the city, women are more successful at finding a job when they move from rural regions

than many men (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). The city is more socially progressive than rural regions, meaning that employers are less likely to discriminate against hiring a woman. Women are more likely to be employed in Tunis not only because the city is more socially progressive, but also because women are quite often better job candidates: they are perceived as harder working and more reliable. And they are usually better educated and invariably willing to accept lower salaries (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019).

Some of social workers I interviewed who worked in Douar Hicher described how women were often more successful than their husbands at finding work, mainly in the nearby factories or as cleaners in businesses and homes in wealthy neighbourhoods (Simon and Nadia, July 1, 2019). However, the woman's transition from homemaker to breadwinner in Douar Hicher has not sparked a change in the man's role in the home. Men in Douar Hicher are not taking care of housework because they believe they should be working and are not. A 2015 survey of youth aged 18-34 found that 41 percent of men claimed that female labour participation was not important, mainly because they believed that jobs should first be given to men (International Alert, 2015).

As Table 5.1 indicates, women in Douar Hicher are more economically active and less likely to be unemployed than women in the five governorates with the highest annual out-migration rates since 2004 (INS, 2014). In Douar Hicher, the female labour market participation rate was 33 percent, while the average in the other five governorates was 21 percent. Only 26 percent of female jobseekers were unemployed in Douar Hicher, while in the interior regions, the average unemployment rate of women looking for work

was 33 percent. This means that women in Douar Hicher were not only more likely to want to work but were also more likely to find a job if they were looking for one. At the same time, women were slightly more likely to be married in Douar Hicher than they might be in the interior regions (INS, 2014).

Table 5.1 Female Economic Activity Rates in Douar Hicher and Interior Provinces

Region	Female Economic Activity Rate	Female Unemployment Rate	Female Marital Rates	Net Annual Migration Per 1000 Residents
Interior Provinces Average*	22%	33%	56%	-33
Douar Hicher	33%	26%	59%	46
Tunisia Average	28%	23%	57%	-2

Source: 2014 National Census, Tunisian National Institute of Statistics;

** - Interior Provinces were: Siliana, Kairouan, Jendouba, Le Kef, and Kasserine; chosen for their high migration rates to Greater Tunis. For a map of Tunisia, see Appendix M.*

According to social workers in Douar Hicher, the fact that women are increasingly involved in salaried work, and, at the same time, being left in charge of housework and childcare as wives and mothers, has led to a situation in which “the mother is always in charge of everything: of her children, of her house, and also she works” (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). Meanwhile, the father is absent – he is not taking care of the housework or childcare. For example, when social workers notice bad behaviour in a child, they invite the families to help them intervene. Sometimes the mother and father come together, they explained, but never the father alone. “During the time that the woman is working,” they said, “the man should be watching the kids, but he is not. The father is playing a marginalized role...yet the people put the blame on her. People ask

her: ‘where were you when your children got lost?’ And her answer is that she was earning money for her kids” (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019).

The result is that families in Douar Hicher are prone to conflict: overburdened mothers cannot commute and work long hours as well as raise children and take care of the home. Meanwhile, men are not doing their share – they are either not finding reliable work or they are not contributing to the housework and childcare. The neighbourhood is full of men in cafes on weekdays during work hours, and when children arrive at school or leave for the day, few adult men are present (author’s observations, June, 2019; Zain, February 18, 2019). In normal circumstances, children in the community are being raised by overworked mothers and absent fathers. In more extraordinary circumstances, marital tensions from these shifting gender responsibilities result in domestic abuse or domestic violence (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). Using the survey of residents in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen from 2015, 13 percent of women interviewed reported experiencing physical assault in the past year, but 40 percent described that violence as perpetrated against them by family members (Ben Zina, 2018).

With this level of domestic tension, social workers noted that many children are not just ignored as they grow up, but some actively avoid going home, and community groups (i.e., family networks or local civil society organization) are not helping families manage these transitions, resolve their disputes, or help families look after their children (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). Normally, for example, this tension could be ameliorated by extended personal networks who could shoulder some of the burden of

family care. However, in Douar Hicher, because so many families are new to the neighbourhood, these relationships are not yet strong enough to provide that kind of support (Simon and Nadia, July 1, 2019; Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019).

5.1.3 Douar Hicher's Limited Social Hierarchy - Effects

There are many examples around the world of overpopulated areas that lack municipal services but still retain a social hierarchy, such as the activist residents of Brazil's favelas (Fahlberg, 2018). But in Douar Hicher, there was limited local social structure that could govern in lieu of the state in Douar Hicher before Tunisia's revolution. From the previous sections, we can identify three reasons this occurred. First, new settlers moved to Douar Hicher from across the country, bringing different traditions and family networks. Second, many individuals moved there without knowing anyone else, which meant they arrived without contributing to the development of local institutions. For example, in Khalid Ibn El Walid, a small part of Douar Hicher, landlords commonly exploit new arrivals who do not know anyone else in the neighbourhood and therefore have no social protection. While I observed, social workers were discussing the case of a woman who arrived with her infant son in Douar Hicher in order to be closer to a hospital so he could receive better medical care. She was offered the chance to live rent free in an apartment in Khalid Ibn El Walid in exchange for prostituting herself on behalf of the landlord (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). And, third, the intense speed at which settlers migrated to Douar Hicher since 1975 meant that it was hard for nascent local institutions to grow fast enough to accommodate them.

Crime and gang violence thrived due to the limited local social hierarchy in Douar Hicher. Given the lack of traditional bonds that might organize their activities or limit their violence (i.e., intermarriage between large families, widely accepted traditional or tribal dispute resolution mechanisms), criminal organizations targeted residents opportunistically, unrestrained by any higher ordering principle. Residents therefore consistently report feeling unsafe when they travel through their own neighbourhood, particularly at night (Fatima, February 20, 2019). A 2015 survey of youth found that 71 percent believed security in their neighbourhood was “bad” or “very bad” (International Alert, 2015). A 2017 survey of youth found the same: over 50 percent of youth confirmed that they did not feel safe in Douar Hicher (Youth Without Borders, 2017). Before the revolution, many children would escape their tumultuous home life and join local gangs, which provided them a measure of protection while they were out of their house. After the revolution, as Chapter Seven will show, many joined Salafi-Jihadi groups.

5.1.4 Douar Hicher’s Political, Social, and Economic Isolation

This section summarizes the pervasive sense of isolation in Douar Hicher – a second condition that contributed to it eventually becoming a recruitment hub. It reviews each dimension of this isolation – political, social, and economic – because they are mutually reinforcing. Because many residents in Douar Hicher purchased cheap land and built houses without appropriate permits, they lacked legal standing, which meant that they generally avoided collective action through formal political channels (i.e., to lobby their government for more investment in public transportation or cultural,

educational, and recreational resources). They lacked political representation while Tunisia was governed by two leaders of the one-party post-independence state – Habib Bourguiba (1956-1987) and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011). Those leaders selected advisors from coastal elites in the former case, and family members and business elites in the latter case (Buehler and Ayari, 2018).

In part because of Douar Hicher's inability to affect political change through formal channels, the neighbourhood helped anti-state political movements during the Ben Ali era. Residents helped protect members of Ennahda, in the 1990s and 2000s a heavily persecuted religious opposition political movement. Because of this support, Douar Hicher and neighbouring Ettadhamen were seen as a locus of anti-government activism. As a result, the government excluded these adjoining neighbourhoods from some of its high-profile urban renewal programmes (Khalid, May 2, 2019).

Figure 5.3 Founding Members of Ennahda Meet Near Douar Hicher



Source: Senior Ennahda members draft official incorporation papers for their political party in Sahbi Atig's house in Ettadhamen, a neighbourhood adjoining Douar Hicher. Atig is second from right. Source: photo provided to the author by Samir Dilou, seen holding the paper in the picture (June 12, 2019).

Ennahda leaders would meet in the house of Sahbi Atig, one of the group's most senior members, who lived in the neighbourhood next to Douar Hicher (Sahbi Atig, June 25, 2019). Ennahda leaders met at Atig's house because "everyone [in Ennahda] knew where the house was, and [because] the youth of the street guarded the house" (Sahbi Atig, June 25, 2019). The youth guarded Atig's house as they might any local resident with police problems: they would be on the lookout for police and warn those in the house if they approached (Sahbi Atig, June 25, 2019). Samir Dilou, another senior member of Ennahda, confirmed that the group felt safe meeting at Atig's house thanks to the protection of residents in the neighbourhood (Samir Dilou, June 12, 2019). Atig's house was so important to Ennahda that the group met there after the revolution to draft their official political charter and to organize the return to Tunisia of Ennahda leader and co-founder, Rachid Ghannouchi (Samir Dilou, June 12, 2019).

Douar Hicher's residents hoped their prospects would change after Ennahda won in a landslide in nationwide elections in October 2011. People from Douar Hicher believed Ennahda's ascension was a chance to change their neighbourhood. But they "felt used" after Ennahda was elected, because Ennahda's victory brought no change (Chaima, February 20, 2019). A 2015 survey of youth in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen found that 90 percent believed that conditions had not changed or worsened after the revolution: 94 percent said this was due to the absence of elected local officials, and 92 percent said it was due to a lack of space to voice concerns. People "gave the group [Ennahda] support and felt like they got nothing in return," explained Chaima, whereas "the Salafis did things that people expected from Ennahda – they made people behave

more honourably” (Chaima, February 20, 2019). Even Sahbi Atig, Ettadhamen's native son, soon moved out of the neighbourhood after Ennahda rose to power, citing security concerns (June 25, 2019).

Douar Hicher's persistent political isolation after the revolution they supported meant that most people did not obey the rules of Tunisian government because they did not believe that government represented their interests. Once the government receded after the revolution, there was little left remaining to take its place and order local politics. The Salafi-Jihadis that emerged after the revolution took advantage of this power vacuum in Douar Hicher and other neighbourhoods like it.

5.1.5 Douar Hicher's Social Isolation

Social discrimination against Douar Hicher residents reinforced the community's sense of isolation and gave rise to an anti-establishment culture that emerged before the revolution – as evidenced by the community's support for Ennahda under the Ben Ali dictatorship. After the revolution, as this chapter will later show, this anti-establishment culture transferred to the ideology of Salafi-Jihadism once it emerged.

Social discrimination against residents of Douar Hicher was pervasive. “They feel like even though they are under the Tunisian sky, they are still not welcome in certain neighbourhoods” explained Moez, who works with families from neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher who lost relatives to the fighting in Syria (Moez, July 3, 2019). Residents of Douar Hicher describe being humiliated by police at checkpoints and turned down from jobs because employers say they can't trust people to get to their jobs from the neighbourhood. One young man from Douar Hicher explained that “young people [from

Douar Hicher can] spend a year without going into the city because the police can stop the number 56 bus just before the tunnel or at the Bab el-Khadra terminus, to check people's papers, and they categorise people at random, saying, 'You, come over here! You, here!' (ICG, 2013). One of the ways they try to arrest young people is by checking whether they performed their mandatory military service, which in Tunisia is one year and mandatory for everyone with certain exceptions that generally allow wealthier Tunisians to avoid service (i.e., through employment exemptions) (Lamloum, 2016). Because their neighbourhood is noted on their ID card, police often stop Douar Hicher residents (i.e., at public beaches, shopping malls, traffic stops) as soon as they find out what neighbourhood they come from (Marwan, June 10, 2019; Mustafa, June 19, 2019).

Harsh police treatment of Douar Hicher residents is one example of the regular discrimination residents faced in the rest of Greater Tunis. Tunis city dwellers see themselves as cosmopolitan, secular, liberal, and well-educated nationalists, which they juxtapose with people from rural regions of Tunisia characterized as poor, uneducated, religious, conservative, and narrow-minded (Memmi, 1955). A phrase in Tunisian dialect reflects this prejudice: "from behind the signs," whose literal meaning is to describe a person who is from a village so remote that there are no signs to denote the name of the place (Zain, February 18, 2019).

The term is intended as an insult to ignorant villagers by urbane city dwellers. But being "from behind the signs" is used against residents of places like Douar Hicher as well, since they are assumed to have recently moved from Tunisia's rural regions (Zain,

February 18, 2019). In a telling recent example of the phrase, people in Douar Hicher explained how the head of the municipality in Bardo, an area near Douar Hicher but closer to downtown Tunis, was filmed telling off a constituent. She claimed not to have time for someone from behind the signs (Zain, February 18, 2019). The incident caused a controversy, and she was eventually forced to apologize (al-Maghrib, 2019). But her story highlights the extent to which discrimination against the seemingly uncivilized rural peasant not only applies to people who live in Tunisia's interior, but even against residents in places like Douar Hicher as well.

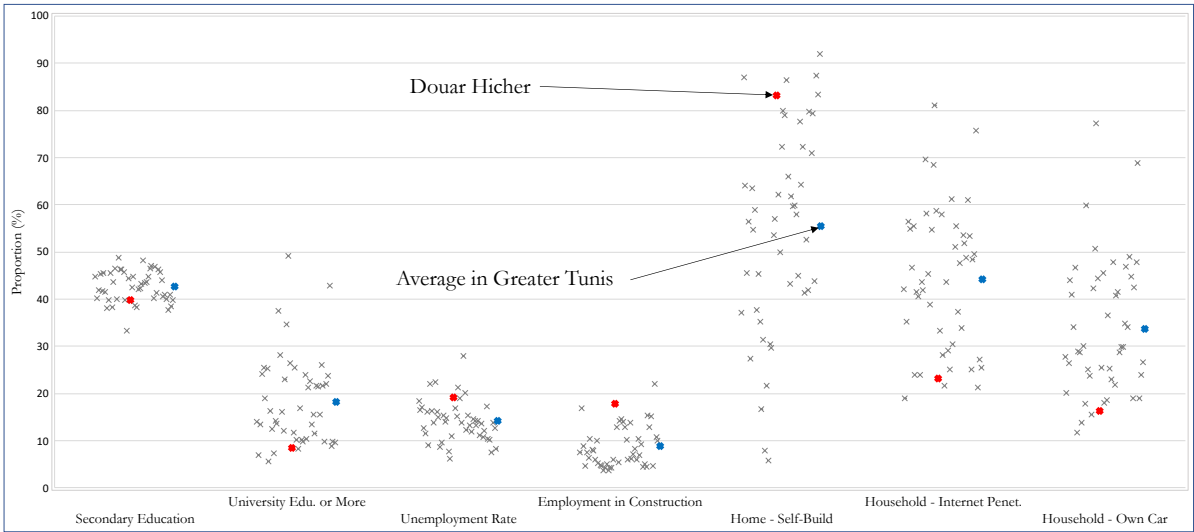
5.1.6 Douar Hicher's Economic Isolation

Although the lives of Douar Hicher's residents may have improved after they moved to the city, they still struggled to find work in Douar Hicher. As this section will show, residents from Douar Hicher were more likely to be unemployed even if they held a college degree, more likely to leave school early, more likely to work low-paying jobs even when they find steady work, and less likely to access key economic services, such as banking.

First, residents from Douar Hicher were much more likely to be unemployed than elsewhere in Greater Tunis. Statistics from Tunisia's 2014 census show that Douar Hicher's rate of unemployment (19 percent) was one standard deviation above the average in Greater Tunis (14 percent) (see Figure 5.4). The higher rate of unemployment in Douar Hicher might make sense because residents in Douar Hicher are more likely to drop out after high school than the rest of Greater Tunis. But even university graduates

from Douar Hicher were more likely to be unemployed than those elsewhere in Greater Tunis (INS, 2014). This finding is consistent with the previous chapter, which highlighted high rates of unemployment among university graduates as a factor ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs shared in common. But rather than assuming that this is the product solely of the individual experience, the broader conditions in Douar Hicher suggest that university-level unemployment may be a proxy for a wider range of difficulties imposed on an entire community rather than experienced by an individual. Individuals in Douar Hicher struggle to find employment in general, but as part of a broader set of challenges entering the formal labour market that residents of the entire neighbourhood face. For example, a 2017 survey in Douar Hicher found that over 90 percent of youth said that their employment prospects were poor because of the bad reputation of their neighbourhood, while less than that – 80 percent - reported lacking proper job training (Youth Without Borders, 2017).

Figure 5.4 Economic Exclusion in Douar Hicher Compared to Greater Tunis



Source: 2014 National Census, Tunisian National Institute of Statistics

Already facing steep costs on the demand side to entering the formal job market, residents of Douar Hicher have to cope with Tunisia's unusually high burdens of full-time formal employment on the supply side as well. A 2018 survey of Tunisia's economy by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that Tunisia's labour market imposes much higher tax burdens on firms with formal employees and steeper restrictions on those firms to fire their formal, full time staff (OECD, 2018). These costs to entering the formal job market form another barrier for those in Douar Hicher: employers are unlikely to hire them because the cost of formal employment is high, and because, in their minds, hiring someone from Douar Hicher is risky. Thus, residents from Douar Hicher are much more likely to hold low-paying, fixed-term jobs in factories or construction when they do find work in the formal economy (INS, 2014).

As a result of these steep barriers to formal employment, residents of Douar Hicher are liable to turn to the informal economy. One report estimated that 50 percent of young people work in Tunisia's informal economy, and only 1 in 10 in a given year make the switch from informal work to the formal economy (OECD, 2018). Douar Hicher is known for trade in second-hand products, smuggled appliances, petty crime, and the drug trade (Meddeb, 2015). Tunisia's grey and black markets benefit from the fact that Tunisia is on the Mediterranean and is neighbours with Algeria and Libya, two oil-rich countries whose subsidies pose tremendous arbitrage opportunities for Tunisian commodities smugglers. One smuggler from near Douar Hicher explained that, to buy his goods, he would "go to the big market [in Ben Guerdane, Tunisia's border town with

Libya], and...people would give me money and ask me to bring back something for them, for example a washing machine” that would be smuggled from Libya (Frische, 2015).

The vendors of Douar Hicher sell smuggled goods in small scale; they do not organize and sell further upmarket, where the real profits lie. Vendors from neighbourhoods try to earn their “daily bread” – they do not earn large amounts of money from cross-border smuggling or any other type of informal market activity (i.e., street vending) (Meddeb, 2015). Even the drug trade and criminal activity in Douar Hicher was low level (Omar, June 10, 2019). Yet to work in these informal sectors, despite their low profits, people need protection. So young men from Douar Hicher form street gangs or join violent soccer support groups called “Ultras” as ways to enhance their collective security (Hasan, June 13, 2019). This activity often led to a deepening of the illegal status of young people in Douar Hicher and has made them subject to frequent arrest and detention. Salafi-Jihadis would take advantage of the precarious legal status of these young men when they took over the neighbourhood, promising membership that would, for a time, help provide the best protection from police (Marwan, June 10, 2019).

Even residents of Douar Hicher gainfully employed in the formal sector needed to rely on parts of the informal economy to make ends meet because they lacked access to economic services like banking. A father of a family of four working as a driver earned 800 Tunisian dinars (£230) per month steadily for eight years. However, he spends 1.5 times that salary – double the minimum wage – just to meet his monthly expenses. This

father, Hamid, cannot borrow from the bank because the fees are too high; Tunisia's banking sector is not designed to support excluded communities like those in Douar Hicher because residents cannot supply enough collateral for their loans. To account for the difference, Hamid asks his friends for loans. In order to eventually pay off these loans, his wife takes their children to live at her parents' home for extended periods of time. Only by relying on his family network for child support, and his friend network for micro-loans, is Hamid able to meet his expenses (Hamid, June 22, 2019). An OECD study of Tunisia's economy confirmed that banking in poor areas like Douar Hicher is virtually non-existent: only 27 percent of Tunisians have a bank account, seven percent have a debit card, and micro-loans are still in development – banks expect at minimal more for collateral to service a loan than Hamid could earn in half a year (5,000 dinars, or £1,335) (OECD, 2018).

5.1.7 Douar Hicher's Isolation - Effects

Residents in Douar Hicher have processed their isolation through an anti-establishment culture that claims solidarity with other working-class neighbourhoods in Greater Tunis. Rap music is one popular means of expressing this culture. Similar to themes about the "hood" in American rap music, Tunisian rappers often talk about life in the "Ḥūma." Ḥūma is a Tunisian word that designates a working-class neighbourhood that is not necessarily a slum, but one where residents have a strong local identity (Barone, 2017). One song, called "Ḥūmanī," (meaning someone raised in the Ḥūma), talks about how living in the neighbourhood felt "like trash in the dustbin," and was

“suffocating” (Barone, 2017). Another song in the genre described in just several lines the themes of substance abuse, family problems, and the feeling of being exploited that youth also expressed in Douar Hicher:

Here, when a child wants candy, the adults make you drink boukha¹²
It's the language of the sūqs, the harassment of the sūqs...
For the people of my quarter, Chiheb and Haha
We live in a country where the system fishes us [in] Bab El Fellah
We'll only rest in our graves.¹³

Participating in rap music groups or local gangs cultivated a strong anti-establishment culture that could also be seen in the violent confrontations between youth and police. Marwan, for example, described how he was currently wanted by the police because he helped a friend escape police custody by running to the roof of a nearby house and pelting security forces with rocks as they tried to detain his friend (Marwan, June 10, 2019). Like his friend, Marwan cannot find a job outside his neighbourhood for fear that he might be stopped on his way to work by a police checkpoint. Neither Marwan, nor his friend are alone: Douar Hicher's youth experience the state so often through its police that they have developed codes to warn each other about law enforcement patrols, which they call “pigeons” or “serpents” (Hanin, June 10, 2019).

The anti-establishment culture of Douar Hicher, drawn from constant discrimination in society and mistreatment by law enforcement, was easily transferrable to Salafi-Jihadism once the movement emerged in Tunisia after the revolution. Salafi-

¹² “Boukha” is a sweet Tunisian liquor

¹³ “sūqs” are the street markets. Chiheb and Haha are blocks inside the Bab El Fellah neighbourhood, a working class area between Douar Hicher and the Medina in downtown Tunis (Barone, 2017).

Jihadism is an anti-normative and anti-system ideology that seeks to overthrow with violence what it defines as an un-Islamic state and replace it with one that follows literalist Islamic principles. In some respects, Salafi-Jihadism is distinguished from all other forms of Salafist belief because of its insistence on action, mainly through violence, as a means of bringing about a more just political system and society (Maher, 2016).

Although Chapter Seven will describe recruitment in detail, one example of how useful the comparisons were between Douar Hicher's anti-establishment culture and Salafi-Jihadism is that recruiters would often start a conversation with potential recruits about the injustice of the state and security services. The recruiter, who himself might be an ex-convict, could bond with a potential recruit over shared stories of police brutality. As one Salafi-Jihadi from Douar Hicher quipped when describing this overlap: "I hated tyrants even before it became the [Salafi-Jihadi] curriculum" (al-Hajj Salem, 2014).

5.2 How a Hub Formed in Douar Hicher After the Revolution

The first part of this chapter described how Douar Hicher's limited forms of social hierarchy and social, political, and economic isolation meant that it was particularly susceptible to Salafi-Jihadism after the revolution in the absence of state authority. This part of Chapter Five explains more about who Salafi-Jihadis were, how they formed AST, and how they took control of Douar Hicher after the revolution.

Section 5.2 is divided into three parts: the first describes who the Salafi-Jihadis of Douar Hicher were, how they first formed, and how they later connected to AST,

which nationalized the movement and gave it a political agenda (5.2.1). The second explains how the Salafi-Jihadis of Douar Hicher took over local mosques, which gave them a physical presence to organize activities, a sense of legitimacy and righteousness to their cause, and an ability to proselytize to a much larger audience (5.2.2). The third part compares this to Tunisia's security services, which could not function in the months after the revolution. In their stead, Salafi-Jihadists began to protect residents. In doing so, they took control of Douar Hicher (5.2.3). This chapter concludes with several vignettes that describe the nature of the Salafi-Jihadi control over Douar Hicher (5.2.4).

5.2.1 Salafi-Jihadis Emerge in Douar Hicher

Before the revolution, the state heavily policed religious expression, and it closely monitored poor neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher (Wolf, 2017). The fact that Douar Hicher was a priority law enforcement area, combined with the state's antipathy towards religious expression, meant that there were few credible religious leaders in places like Douar Hicher. In Douar Hicher, therefore, imams were state informants and regime propagandists, not religious scholars (Sahbi Atig, June 25, 2019). The fact that few imams in neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher were well-respected religious scholars, and most were state informants, meant that imams in those neighbourhoods were much more likely to leave their mosques after the revolution (for more, see Section 5.2.2). By 2011, therefore, Salafi-Jihadis had few competitors in the mosques of many neighbourhoods (Sahbi Atig, June 25, 2019). That most imams left their mosques in Douar Hicher after the revolution was a key reason why Salafi-Jihadis emerged in poorer

neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher – they filled a conspicuous gap in religious services in these areas.

After Tunisia's revolution, young people started to meet under the tutelage of someone who had studied Salafi-Jihadism with scholars in the MENA region – often in Syria or Saudi Arabia (Sahbi Atig, June 25, 2019). Learning religious doctrine together was a meaningful experience for many young people. It was, for nearly all, the first time they could freely study and express their religious beliefs (Wassim, June 30, 2019). In the spring of 2011, local Salafi-Jihadi networks started self-organizing, setting up study groups and preaching booths. In Greater Tunis, these were common in places like Douar Hicher, where preachers proselytized Salafi-Jihadism in the public squares of the neighbourhood, outside schools, and near informal work settings (Bakr, June 7, 2019). At first, the process of forming local study groups was a natural expression of the desire of young people to learn more about Islam and the closeness of their relationships growing up in the neighbourhood. As one Salafist recalled:

In reality, we were nothing more than 'sons of the Ḥūma,' a group of kids that grew up together in the same neighbourhood. The only difference now is that we were building up a new identity. During our recreation time together, often playing a football game or having a picnic in the mountain, we would speak about religion. This is how a group of friends from the [neighbourhood] would find themselves turning into a Salafi group...we were one group, but inside, there was a specific shared spirit among the Salafis (Merone, 2013).

Salafi-Jihadism became popular after the Tunisian revolution in part because, for the first time, it could organize without resistance from state security in a religious community that had not been able to practice freely in decades (Ali La'arayedh, July 3,

2019). This gave AST as a political organization the opportunity to reach tens of thousands of potential recruits who were interested in Islam and, for the most part, uneducated in Islamic principles.

In Douar Hicher, Tunisians initially interested in Salafi-Jihadism consisted of three main groups who emerged after the revolution. First, ex-convicts, some of whom were Salafi-Jihadis before the revolution, but who were mostly imprisoned on other charges and indoctrinated in prison. These prisoners were virtually all granted amnesty in the months after the 2010-2011 revolution (ICG, 2013). Second, some exiles (forced or self-imposed) who held Salafi-Jihadi beliefs or who were trained by conservative preachers abroad and returned after the revolution (Joscelyn, 2012). Finally, a small number of intellectually curious young people from the neighbourhood adopted Salafi-Jihadi beliefs, such as via conservative preachers they had watched on satellite television channels from Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Bakr, June 7, 2019). These three groups started forming the earliest Salafi-Jihadi networks.

While other religious entities, such as Ennahda, focused on winning elections, AST concentrated on identifying and supporting these nascent Salafi-Jihadi grassroots groups. Their leaders began preaching in Douar Hicher, even though none of them were from the neighbourhood (Bakr, June 7, 2019; Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019). With an ambitious political agenda, and by traveling across the country, they connected Salafi-Jihadis in Douar Hicher with like-minded networks elsewhere in Tunisia (Wassim, June 30, 2019). AST organized conferences and developed a system of guest lectures that would bring some of Tunisia's most prominent Salafi-Jihadis to Douar Hicher (Habib

Sayah, June 8, 2019; Zelin, August 3, 2019). These guest lectures and national conferences, combined with a well-run media apparatus that facilitated regular public media appearances by AST's leaders, normalized Salafi-Jihadism in Tunisia and gave its adherents from Douar Hicher a sense that they were part of a larger cause (Wolf, 2017). Many members who became active in AST joined an organized political movement that galvanized them to collective action for the first time (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019).

As a political organization, AST did not necessary control Douar Hicher's Salafi-Jihadi networks in a hierarchical or institutional sense (al-Hajj Salem, 2014). Rather, AST was a connector of various local study groups. AST leaders were also admired in places like Douar Hicher because of their combination of religious training and combat experience (i.e., in Iraq or Afghanistan). This created an aura of respect for AST leaders like Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, AST's leader, who fought with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, or Kamal Zarrouk, a charismatic and militant lieutenant in AST who grew up near Douar Hicher and fought previously in Iraq (Bakr, June 7, 2019).

AST also had a well-developed media production wing, which made people who attended or participated in their events feel like they were on television (Wassim, June 30, 2019). Thus, by building meaningful bonds between disparate but like-minded networks of friends in neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher, by having respected leaders, by having a carefully crafted media image, and by organizing events that gave people a sense of purpose, AST leaders became the de facto head of the Salafi-Jihadism movement in Tunisia. With more affiliation to AST over time, Salafi-Jihadis in Douar

Hicher went from part of an atomized and spontaneously organized social movement into active and politically ambitious members of AST's nationwide political organization.

5.2.2 Taking Over Douar Hicher's Mosques

With AST's encouragement, and as part of its broader political project of proselytizing Salafi-Jihadi ideas, Salafi-Jihadis in Douar Hicher started taking over their neighbourhood mosques. Although it was unlikely part of their plan at the time, taking control of Douar Hicher's mosques was the first step in transforming the neighbourhood into a hub of AST support.

It was easy for Salafi-Jihadis to capture Douar Hicher's mosques after the revolution: they were leaderless. During the revolution, residents in the neighbourhood raided the local political party office of the former dictator because these offices were crucial parts of the former dictator's police state (Wolf, 2017). In that raid, residents uncovered a trove of documents naming the government's informants in the neighbourhood. These documents included the names of imams as neighbourhood informants, and it listed their salaries and what information they were expected to provide. All the imams in Douar Hicher were included in this list (Mostafa, June 19, 2019). In lower class communities, these imams were part of the state's mass surveillance of Tunisia's poor regions: "we knew [the imams] were informants," explained Ahmed, "The only thing we didn't know [before recovering the documents] was how much they were getting paid" (Ahmed, September 26, 2019).

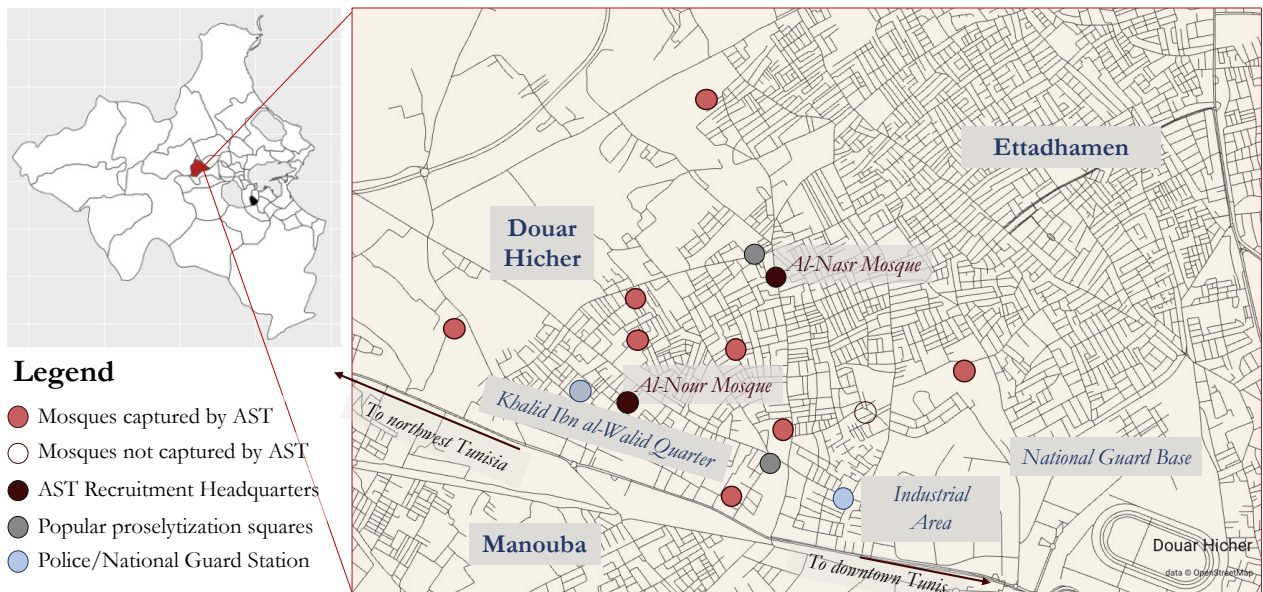
The mass release of the names of these imam informants – Tunisia’s version of a Wikileaks-style information dump – led many imams to flee their mosques and, in some cases, leave their neighbourhood entirely (Omar, May 1, 2019; Ahmed, September 26, 2019). The result was that local Salafi-Jihadi study groups could walk into the many mosques abandoned by imams who had served as informants under the former dictatorship. Figure 5.5 shows the mosques in Douar Hicher which were captured by Salafi-Jihadis and the one mosque which they did not capture. This mosque is in the wealthiest and oldest part of Douar Hicher, and the imam was protected by gangs of Ennahda supporters (Zain, February 18, 2019). In total, 10 out of Douar Hicher’s 11 mosques fell into Salafi-Jihadi hands within a year after the revolution (al-Hajj Salem, 2014).

The mosque was the locus for AST’s control of Douar Hicher. Before the revolution, the role of religious associations in the community was constrained because the Ben Ali and Bourguiba regimes feared the religious community would become a political rival (Wolf, 2017). After the revolution, however, the mosque expanded to fill social, commercial, organizational, cultural, and educational roles in the community. This practice of mosques as a multi-use space was magnified in neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher, where there were few alternative cultural centres or recreational facilities to use (Youth Without Borders, 2017). In lieu of other gathering places, mosques were, in effect, community centres.

Capturing Douar Hicher’s mosques put Salafi-Jihadis at the centre of post-revolution community life. Members of the group would socialize there before and after

prayer, would often organize activities in the mosque, and sell second-hand goods or fruits and vegetables in stalls outside the mosque (al-Hajj Salem, 2014). Members would debate politics there and study the Qur'an. The mosque became the centre of everyday life for members of the group and offered wider exposure to their beliefs and practices.

Figure 5.5 Map of AST's Control of Mosques in Douar Hicher



Source: Compiled by author; Map source: Kashcha, 2020

Mosques were critical to establishing a hub of recruitment for Salafi-Jihadism in Douar Hicher. Not only did they give local adherents a respected platform, but control of the mosques also gave supporters a physical gathering place to study and organize activities. Control of these holy spaces also affirmed their belief in the righteousness of their cause. It was crucial for recruitment purposes as well, because it gave AST a friendly and innocuous place to bring new recruits after they were first approached. Figure 5.2 showed al-Nasr mosque. Figure 5.6 shows the al-Nour mosque. These were the two headquarters of AST recruitment in Douar Hicher. Note in this instance the

importance of local commerce in front of the al-Nour mosque. Chapter Seven will describe in more detail how AST used the location of mosques near markets to influence local commerce.

Figure 5.6 al-Nour Mosque, a Headquarters of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia Recruitment in Douar Hicher



Source: photo taken by author on June 26, 2019.

Chapter Seven will also describe how AST used the mosques themselves. AST's recruitment pitch varied depending on the target, but the goal of the first approach was almost always to get potential recruits to agree to pray at a nearby mosque. This gave the recruiter a chance to speak in private and surround the potential recruit with other members of the group who could peer pressure him or her. The use of the mosque also appealed to the potential recruit's identity as a Muslim, as the recruitment appealed to

the recruit's "sacred religious" values in a place of worship (Atran, 2010a; Pretus et al., 2018).

5.2.3 Forming Popular Protection Committees

Aside from taking over the mosques, the second important thing AST did to establish their control in Douar Hicher was to replace the police and assume the role of ensuring public order. Before the revolution, Douar Hicher was an area where police rarely entered on their own; they would only travel through the neighbourhood in large convoys supported by armed national guard. That is because Douar Hicher was one of the most feared neighbourhoods in Tunis – crime was rampant, and it was difficult for police to patrol the neighbourhood safely (Chaima, February 2019). During the revolution, Douar Hicher was the site of intense clashes with police (Zain, February 2019). Afterwards, with the police in disarray due to the chaotic post-revolutionary transition, law enforcement effectively withdrew from the neighbourhood completely (Jebnoun, 2017).

As a result of the chaotic conditions of the revolution, youth in the neighbourhood started forming protection committees (*liġān as-sha'biyya*) to defend their neighbourhood from being looted (Allal, 2011). But many of these youth-led neighbourhood watch groups were later co-opted by Salafi-Jihadis, who transformed their efforts in the service of protecting the community based on literalist Salafi-Jihadi religious customs (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013). At first, Salafi-Jihadis were far more effective at reducing crime in Douar Hicher than the Tunisian police had ever been. One resident, who had served several prison sentences, explained that "when there is a robbery, for example,

they [the Salafi-Jihadis] step in and tell us, ‘go on boys, you have to give those things back to their owner!’ They get involved to stop it from getting to the police” (Lamloum, 2016). Whereas previously, from the perspective of residents, it felt like armed police were invading their neighbourhood any time they wanted to arrest a criminal, Salafi-Jihadis were providing community protection by residing in the community (Marwan, June 10, 2019). After the revolution, Salafi-Jihadi protection units policed the community so effectively that residents were grateful for them, praising their ability to reduce petty crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang violence (al-Hajj Salem, 2014).

In particular, Salafi-Jihadi police protected women in the community who were particular prey to assault and robbery. As a social worker explained, before the revolution, women in the neighbourhood would get up at six o’clock in the morning and go to work, commonly as cleaners downtown or as workers in the nearby factories. They would leave their children in day care and walk long distances to catch buses or find taxis. It was at this point in the morning that delinquents, who had been up all night drinking and using drugs, would try to rob them (Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019). But Salafi-Jihadi police ended these crimes when they started protecting the neighbourhood. As Chaima, a resident and local activist explained: “There were people who came to the neighbourhood to convince people to take a new path,” and part of showing residents how this path could help them was that they protected them (Chaima, February 20, 2019).

From the perspective of the community, the situation in the neighbourhood appeared to change overnight. AST had accomplished something in a span of only a

few months that state police had seemingly never managed. AST's policing of delinquent behaviour was a welcome change for residents who feared leaving their home at night. And, from the perspective of mothers whose children were involved with Salafi-Jihadism, at first, they were thrilled. Their sons, many of whom had been involved in drinking, gang violence, and petty crime, were now pious Muslims who adopted a strict regimen of reading the Qur'an, praying regularly, and protecting and supporting the community (Hanin, June 10, 2019; Alma and Zeinab, June 13, 2019).

Salafi-Jihadis were proud of their success. They believed controlling the mosques and the streets of neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher was evidence of the worthiness of their cause. Khatib Idrisi, one of the intellectual leaders of the Salafi-Jihadi movement in Tunisia, succinctly expressed this sentiment in a 2012 interview: "What you call 'Salafism,'" he explained, "is what secures the roads, public buildings and hospitals, who clean the streets, who secure the souks, etc." (ICG, 2013, p. 19). Their control of Douar Hicher also helped Salafi-Jihadis recruit many new followers. Eventually, Salafi-Jihadists saw securing the neighbourhood as the first step in the next phase of their efforts to transform the state of Tunisia into a more Islamic society. Khatib Idrisi described how this transition would work: "With the Tunisian revolution, God has begun to end the tyrannical regime. The next regime will be a new caliphate where we will at last live in accordance with the rules decreed by our Prophet" (ICG, 2013, p. 17).

5.2.4 Douar Hicher Under AST Control

From the perspective of Tunisia's law enforcement, the transformation of Douar Hicher to Salafi-Jihadist control felt like a takeover. In May 2012, Zeineb Rezgui, a

journalist, alighted from a train along with hundreds of evening commuters at the Intilaka metro stop, the closest tram station to Douar Hicher. Wearing a sleeveless summer dress, she was accosted by several Salafi-Jihadi street vendors, who first scolded her for her supposedly immodest clothing and then started beating her. After she managed to escape, Rezgui immediately went to the nearest police station and helped the commissioner identify the perpetrators. Later, Rezgui found out that the policemen had not punished the men who beat her, because they had, in his words, threatened him and “vowed to burn his house and kill his family” if he tried to arrest them (Whitson, 2012).

Another policeman best described what Douar Hicher was like when it first became a hub:

The Salafis locate their street vendors at key points in the neighbourhood to earn better profits and recruit new followers. They have a fruit and vegetable stall right next to the police station so they can observe our movements. We can do nothing if we arrest a jihadi for committing a crime, because they give a signal and their ‘brothers’ arrive with reinforcements to free them (ICG, 2013, p. 38-9).

By taking over mosques and ensuring public safety, Salafi-Jihadists started to see themselves as a replacement government. But their control quickly transformed from something positive – providing services in lieu of the state and transforming rowdy youth into pious Muslims – into something more exploitive once AST evolved into a militant organization. “They didn’t take [anything] by force,” explained Ali La’arayedh, the interior minister, when talking about this time, “instead they would ask for money, for a car, for a place to meet in, or for food. So, people gave it to them as if they were

giving it willingly, however this isn't the case – they were afraid of them” (La'arayedh, July 3, 2019).

5.3 Conclusion – Where and How do Hubs Form?

Douar Hicher was not a hub of militancy at first, but a hub of Salafi-Jihadi ideas that started in small, grassroots “action groups” (Atran, 2010b). These groups expanded when they joined a nationwide political organization called AST, whose mission was to build a large following and, eventually, replace the Tunisian state (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013). A political opportunity was a necessary condition for Salafi-Jihadism to emerge in Tunisia. But this explanation alone is insufficient, because this opportunity was nationwide and does not explain subnational variation in where hubs formed. Most of AST's supporters came from isolated communities like Douar Hicher which had limited forms of social hierarchy that could provide order during the chaotic conditions of the revolution and post-revolution in Tunisia. The conclusion of this chapter is that the conditions where hubs of Salafi-Jihadism emerged were where: 1) there was a political opportunity; where the area 2) had limited social hierarchy; and 3) was politically, socially, and economically isolated. These factors, and their testable applications to understanding the subnational variation of where recruitment hubs formed in Tunisia, are included in Table 5.2 below and are described in this section.

First, political opportunity was a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of Salafi-Jihadism and its takeover of Douar Hicher. This occurred across the country after Ben Ali stepped down and when Tunisia's post-revolutionary

transitional government released hundreds of prisoners who had foreign combat experience with transnational jihadist groups. When Tunisia's revolution occurred, it created a more legitimate government (Tessler et al., 2012), but its security services were rendered ineffective (Jebnoun, 2017). This created a nationwide opportunity for Salafi-Jihadism to emerge.

Table 5.2 Conditions for Salafi-Jihadi Movements in Douar Hicher

Factors:	Data indicators (Level):	Factor - Expected Outcome (Douar Hicher):
1. Political Opportunity (Present or Absent):	- State security effectiveness (low) - Crime rates (high)	Present
2. Social Hierarchy (Extensive or Limited):	-Rates of in-migration (high) -Presence of civic groups or other community-based organizations (low)	Limited
3. Economic Involvement (Integrated or Isolated):	-Rate of informal/self-built homes (high) -Unemployment rates (high) -Voter turnout rates (low) -Educational attainment rates (low)	Isolated
Outcome	- AST activity rates - ISIS foreign fighter rates	Became a recruitment hub for ISIS foreign fighters

Source: developed by the author

Yet this national political opportunity of Tunisia's regime change does not explain the subnational variation in Tunisia. Why did hubs emerge in certain parts of Tunisia and not elsewhere? The reason why AST emerged in Douar Hicher in particular is because it had limited social hierarchy. Douar Hicher residents were closely linked to one another – they had a preponderance of “strong tie” relationships built on high frequency of contact and trust (Granovetter, 1973). But these social networks lacked hierarchy and

organization, such as in local labour unions, larger consanguineal relations, or civic groups. As a result, AST took over Douar Hicher similar to the way Arjona observed where rebels captured villages in Colombia. Rebels that have “long time horizons” (i.e., groups with governing goals, such as AST) will try to govern territory unless they encounter communities that have pre-existing local institutions with “a high capacity for collective action” in order to defend them (Arjona, 2016, p. 163). AST’s goal was to place all of Tunisia under literalist Islamic law. The places they had the most success controlling were like Douar Hicher: politically isolated places where residents lacked pre-existing local institutions with sufficient capacity to organize a collective defence in the absence of state control.

In addition, by the Tunisian revolution, Douar Hicher’s residents were isolated politically, socially, and economically. They lacked political representation during the Habib Bourguiba (1956-1987) and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011) regimes. During this time, residents were not just unrepresented in Tunisia’s previous governments – many faced dubious legal standing. Migrants who moved to Douar Hicher starting in the 1970s built homes on technically illegal settlements that they did not possess contracts to own. This lack of political representation led to the neighbourhood being “politically dominated,” not just in terms of underrepresentation in government, but in terms of limited access to power, prestige, resources, and opportunity (Petersen, 2002, p. 40). After the revolution, the rise of religious political movements like Ennahda gave people from Douar Hicher the short-lived belief that a new government would improve their long-ignored community. Ennahda’s failure to improve conditions in their

neighbourhood led people to believe that they could not change their circumstances through normal political channels. But at the same time, local governance was also inadequate to resolve domestic disputes or keep streets safe, even for residents. Thus, the inability to exert pressure on the political system through legal channels, combined with limited means to resolve local disputes, created a power vacuum that Salafi-Jihadis took advantage of after the revolution, specifically in places like Douar Hicher.

Furthermore, residents of Douar Hicher laboured under jobs for which, like the fruit vendor who lit himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid in 2010, they were not given legal work permits. Their uncertain legal status meant it was not just difficult for people in Douar Hicher to lobby their government to improve the neighbourhood (i.e., for better public transit, more green space, less violent and abusive policing, more qualified imams, and more funding for educational, cultural, or recreational activities), it was actually risky for them to organize for legitimate political means given that they could be subject to arrest at virtually any time on a number of technicalities. Meanwhile, the state saw the “problem” of Douar Hicher not as a result of its own mismanagement, but instead as a legal issue that could be resolved by punishing transgressors with aggressive police tactics.

Residents of Douar Hicher were also economically isolated. Douar Hicher’s residents were convinced by the maxim that young people often repeated in cafés: “Study and get a degree or not, you still have no future” (Mt, June 28, 2020). Tunisia’s high barriers to formal employment, and the patronage networks that dominate their pathways to steady work, meant that even qualified individuals from Douar Hicher were

more likely than virtually anywhere else in Greater Tunis to be unemployed (Hibou, 2011). These barriers were not just economic, but social: including not just a lack of access to employment but also to services like public transportation, education, religion, and even legal standing.

Because residents of Douar Hicher were less likely to find formal employment, many gravitated towards the relatively large number of opportunities in the informal economy. These residents worked technically illegal jobs (i.e., street vending without permits, low-level crime or smuggling) in order to make ends meet. These were “driven by the force of necessity” Bayat writes, “[n]ecessity is the notion that justifies their often unlawful acts as moral and even ‘natural’ ways to maintain a life with dignity” (2000, p. 547). Residents in Douar Hicher saw their unlawful acts as morally justified given their condition, even as a way to assert their dignity amid police prosecution and social discrimination.

The challenges of working informal or illegal jobs meant residents of Douar Hicher developed an anti-establishment culture had natural ties with the anti-establishment rhetoric of Salafi-Jihadism when it emerged in Tunisia. Merone and Cavatorta described Tunisia’s Salafi-Jihadi movement as emerging out of Tunisia’s *muhamashin* (“disenfranchised”) (2013, p. 316). Whereas before its emergence residents of Douar Hicher lacked prolonged, well-led and organized collective action, AST provided residents a powerful ideological framework and a particular set of beliefs about political change that they mobilized around. For the first time, popular demands in Douar Hicher were given a name, a set of leaders, and an ideology that structured everyday life in

around the need to reorder society to be more egalitarian and representative of religious values.

The political opportunity caused by the fall of the Tunisian government, combined with limited forms of social hierarchy and the isolation of Douar Hicher, meant that the structural conditions of both opportunity and grievance were essential to AST gaining a following in Douar Hicher. Without these conditions, Salafi-Jihadis would not have been able to control Douar Hicher's mosques and its streets so quickly. Their control over Douar Hicher by the end of 2011 meant that they could expose a wide range of residents in the community to their ideology. But without local grievances, derived from the exclusion of residents in Douar Hicher, residents may not have been so receptive to Salafi-Jihadism as a political program. Jihadism Salafism emerged, and gained popularity in Douar Hicher, because it had the opportunity to do so and because the neighbourhood lacked the ability to advocate for its interests collectively through legitimate political means.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, will describe why, despite similar conditions locally and nationally, a hub did not emerge in Kabaria. Following that chapter, Chapter Seven will not only describe how thousands of members eventually joined ISIS in Syria, but it will also describe what recruitment was like, what the benefits of membership were, and how members were retained inside the movement even as it embraced violence.

CHAPTER 6 | Kabaria

What Happened in the ‘Not Hub’?

“We have religious people but there are no extremists in Kabaria...You will have women with the niqab [veil] and the men with a beard – but when I speak with them I find that they don’t have any violent ideas. They are religious, that’s true, but they are not extremists. That is the case here, but not like Douar Hicher, which might have lots of terrorist elements. But it’s not true for us in Kabaria – we don’t have the fertile land for terrorism to grow in.”

- Layla, a social worker in Kabaria, June 27, 2019.

Introduction

This chapter on Kabaria is divided into two parts. Part one introduces the neighbourhood of Kabaria and identifies the key similarities between Kabaria and Douar Hicher. These include their growth on the urban periphery as a result of rural-urban migration and their social, political, and economic exclusion (6.1). It also highlights one crucial difference between Kabaria and Douar Hicher: whereas Chapter Five described Douar Hicher as having limited social hierarchy, Kabaria had an informal, but strong social hierarchy built on inter-family relationships that ordered the community’s social, economic, and political activities after the state collapsed following Tunisia’s revolution.

Part two describes what happened in Kabaria after the 2010-11 revolution (6.2). First, like all working-class neighbourhoods in Greater Tunis after the revolution, state policing disappeared and many prisoners from Kabaria were released back into the neighbourhood under a general amnesty. But unlike in Douar Hicher, where this opportunity created an opening for Salafi-Jihadis to emerge, the families of Kabaria

coordinated their efforts and policed the neighbourhood. During this time, Salafi-Jihadi social movements did try to make inroads into Kabaria: like in Douar Hicher, they attempted to take over the mosques and control local policing. But in Kabaria, they failed to build a base of support. This chapter explains why, even when Salafi-Jihadis used similar tactics to those deployed in Douar Hicher, they ultimately failed to transform Kabaria into a recruitment hub.

In the end, although Kabaria shared many characteristics that were similar to Douar Hicher, fewer than 10 residents from Kabaria became ISIS foreign fighters, whereas 100-200 residents of Douar Hicher travelled to fight for ISIS in Syria. This chapter concludes (6.3) that a strong, informal social hierarchy in Kabaria, built around decades of organized informal economic activity (i.e., smuggling, illegal migration, drug trade), created an environment in which residents were highly suspicious of outsiders and worked together defend their neighbourhood from AST, which they saw as an outsider organization intent on “colonizing” Kabaria (Wael, March 2, 2020).

6.1 Kabaria Before Tunisia’s Revolution

6.1.1 Background on Kabaria

Like Douar Hicher, Kabaria was created by urban reform policies in the 1960s and 70s while Habib Bourguiba was President of Tunisia. Rural-urban migration to an industrializing Tunis started by the early 1960s, and people were already settling on the land on the outskirts of Tunis – including Douar Hicher to the west and in Kabaria, named for the caper bushes that were common to the area, in the south. “They came from

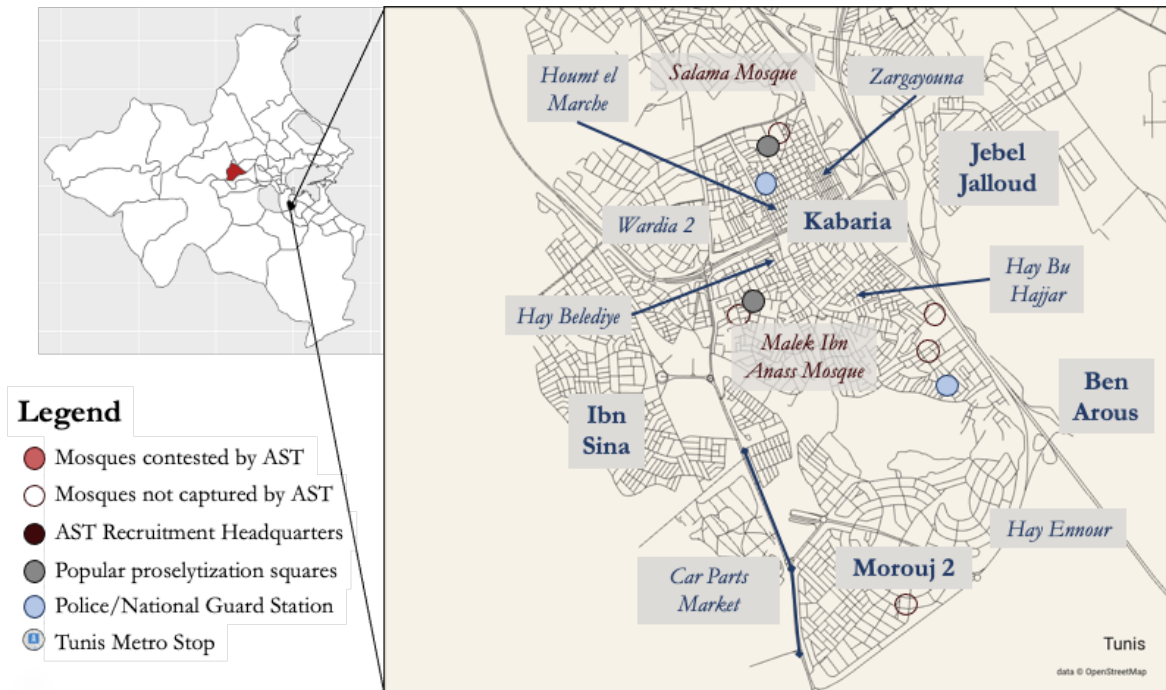
Kairouan, Kef, and Jendouba [poorer provinces in the interior and southern parts of Tunisia]” explained Adil, who was born in 1964 to a family that was one of the first settlers of Kabaria. Adil lived in caves and temporary settlements on the southern outskirts of Tunis for the first three years of his life before his family moved to the first formal, government-created settlements in Kabaria. These first settlers of Kabaria had “run away and escaped hunger in the countryside, so they were not educated, and they did not have anything,” according to Adil (Adil, March 2, 2020). Bourguiba, a self-styled modernist, wanted to transform the lives of rural-urban migrants encroaching on the city outskirts of Tunis. He decided to move these first settlers, living like rural peasants on the grounds of the capital city, into modern, government-built homes.

However, reality did not quite fit Bourguiba’s modernist vision. The first neighbourhood of Kabaria was established by the Tunisian government in 1965. The neighbourhood was called “Zargayouna,” after the head of the Tunis municipality – Béchir Zarga El Ayoun. The government forced the families like Adil’s that had been squatting on land in the southern outskirts of Tunis into the homes it had built in Zargayouna. These homes were 36 square metres and had 2 rooms: a kitchen and a bathroom. They put 2-3 families into each home: “there was no water, no electricity, not anything,” explained Adil, who lived in one of these homes, which were called “government houses” – see the map of Kabaria’s neighbourhoods in Figure 6.1 (Adil, March 2, 2020).

After Zargayouna, the state built “Houmt el Marché” – the market quarter – adjacent to this first settlement in the early 1970s. Adil’s family moved from Zargayouna

to Houmt el Marché in 1973. They moved into a 70 square metre home and were allowed to build additions on it but were not given any paperwork by the government to show that they owned the property. The effect, like in Douar Hicher, was to make it more convenient for residents to pursue business opportunities in the informal economy. The jarring and disempowering process of many early residents moving to Kabaria also made them suspicious of the municipality and law enforcement. Uprooting families to create Kabaria made them suspicious of outsiders.

Figure 6.1 Map of Kabaria's Neighbourhoods and Key Points of Interest



Source: Compiled by author; Map source: Kashcha, 2020.

Fadel was another Kabaria resident who grew up next to the Houmt el Marché area. His earlier family home, closer to the city centre, was bulldozed by the government, which forced the family to move to a home they built in Kabaria: “you can see how people will be resentful of outsiders, especially elites, when many [in Kabaria] had

experiences like these” Fadel explained (Fadel, March 5, 2020). By the 1980s, Kabaria had grown into many adjacent neighbourhoods, including Wardia 2, Hay Belediye, and, for migrants into Kabaria as late as the 1990s, Hay Ennour and Hay Bu Hajjar. In the 1970s and 1980s, Fadel explained, “[Kabaria] was a new area, and all the people are coming and living there from outside the city. They were poor people and didn’t have money...for poor and uneducated people in Kabaria, the suspicion of outsiders is normal” (Fadel, March 5, 2020).

6.1.2 Similarities between Douar Hicher and Kabaria

Douar Hicher and Kabaria were similar neighbourhoods according to the 2014 national census (as outlined in Chapter 3.2). Further, as the previous section explained, they were also both working class neighbourhoods that were founded in the middle of the twentieth century as a result of efforts to modernize the country’s rapidly expanding capital city. Both Douar Hicher and Kabaria were suburbs of Tunis that emerged in the 1960s and grew rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s. Like the Douar Hicher, Kabaria was a major destination for rural migrants after Habib Bourguiba, the country’s first president, tried to modernize the economy by building factories near the capital (Layla, June 27, 2019). Like Douar Hicher, Kabaria is known for having densely populated and working-class neighbourhoods.

This section compares one additional trait that these neighbourhoods shared in common that often came up in interviews: the extent to which the informal economy quickly became the dominant pathway for mobility. The importance of the informal economy in Kabaria, like in Douar Hicher, meant that the neighbourhood was a *Ḥūma*,

a working-class neighbourhood with a reputation for high crime rates. This reputation, among other factors, reinforced a social, political, and economic isolation in Kabaria that resembled Douar Hicher.

The informal economy, in particular illegal migration, was the dominant pathway for economic mobility in Kabaria. Before 1991, Tunisians could travel to Italy without a visa, and many would start earning money there, or smuggle themselves illegally into France and work there. Adil, who grew up in Kabaria and would become a police officer later in life, went to France in 1983 for studies but dropped out and started selling drugs. “You could see people returning from going abroad and buying houses in [Kabaria],” he recalled, “some of the ones that went to France were so rich. Others got thrown in prison. But the main objective was to make money.” Adil started selling drugs in France but was deported. He later returned illegally to Europe and lived for 12 years in Milan, Padova, Nice, Paris, and Brussels (Adil, March 2, 2020).

Fadel argued that the reputation of Kabaria as a hub of criminal activity began from these early efforts of this generation growing up in Kabaria in the 1980s to earn money in Europe. “The people who successfully made these migrations and returned became like stars,” he explained, “all young people wanted to be like them” (Fadel, March 5, 2020). One example Fadel cited was Weld el-Komba, the Komba family. There were four brothers who, although illiterate, made it to Italy and returned and “became stronger than the police” (Fadel, March 5, 2020). Guns were banned in Tunis, but they had them and they would brandish them walking around the neighbourhood. The police learned early on to leave the family alone. In 1992, the Tunisian police arrested one of

the brothers. The other brothers went to the police station and “arrested” the police to free their brother. The Komba brothers stood in front of the police station and handcuffed the police officers, forced them to their knees, and took the station keys from one of the officers while holding them at gunpoint. They walked into the police station with the key and took their brother out of the jail. This defiant attitude toward law enforcement and, by association, the state, helped shape Kabaria’s reputation as a rough, working-class neighbourhood: “when we said we were from Kabaria we were very proud,” explained Fadel, “our neighbourhood was known all over Tunis and people would not mess with us. We felt independent from the state - we called ourselves the ‘Republic of Kabaria.’ The state didn’t have much power over us” (Fadel, March 5, 2020).

Kabaria and Douar Hicher had bad reputations in Tunis; they were socially isolated. As a psychologist in Mornaguia prison – the largest in Tunis – explained: “we should have set up clinics in both of these neighbourhoods [Douar Hicher and Kabaria] - it was like all of our clients were from there” (Abbas, July 2, 2019). Two young residents described the stigma of being from Kabaria: “They think we’re criminals, thieves, kamikaze,” they explained. “If you ask your friends from Bab el Jedid [another neighbourhood in Tunis] to play a football match in your neighbourhood, they won’t come. If you are on the metro and a girl knows you are from Kabaria, she’ll move a little bit away. It’s like toxic” (Amir, March 2, 2020). Hassan, the delegate from Kabaria to the municipality of Tunis, explained how “it was shame to say you lived here” (Hassan, March 2, 2020).

Like Douar Hicher, Kabaria was politically, socially, and economically isolated – people did not want to visit Kabaria and Kabarians had a hard time getting around Tunis or finding formal employment. Fadel grew up in Kabaria in the 1980s and remembered asking a police officer for directions to the German embassy because he was planning to apply for a visa to study in Germany. “I asked the police officer where the embassy of Germany was,” Fadel explained, “He asked for my ID and I gave him my student ID. ‘A student from Kabaria?’ he asked, ‘There are students in Kabaria?’ I say, ‘yes, I’m in an engineering student.’ He says this is impossible – you can’t be an engineering student from Kabaria. [I think it was] the first time he met someone from Kabaria who had a baccalaureate in his life” (Fadel, March 5, 2020). The first time I visited Kabaria, it was with a social worker who had been based in the neighbourhood for 12 years. He told me to unbuckle my seatbelt in the car as we were driving through Hay Ennour, one of Kabaria’s working class neighbourhoods. “People here are suspicious of outsiders,” he explained, “especially those that follow the rules” (Khalid, May 2, 2019).

The stigma of being from Kabaria had similar economic implications to what people experienced from Douar Hicher as well. Employment rates, if analysed properly, are a useful proxy to understand the pathway of residents through the formal and informal economy. Both Kabaria and Douar Hicher have among the highest unemployment rates in Greater Tunis. Unemployment data show that a disproportionate rate of unemployed persons in these two neighbourhoods are those with only a high school diploma. These are residents who graduated high school and tried to enter the workforce but struggled to find a job throughout their 20s. Approximately 18 percent of

the population in both regions are in their 20s, yet young people in this age group comprised more than half of all unemployed persons in these two neighbourhoods (INS, 2014).

This is where illegal migration plays such a critical role. Migration – mainly illegal migration in these two neighbourhoods since few residents try to get visas legally – is seen as key to socioeconomic mobility. Many kids in the 20s – some even younger – migrate illegally, mainly to Italy (Layla, June 27, 2019). Social workers like Layla can track their progress from Tunisia via their families, who keep in touch with family members who reach Europe via text messaging services like WhatsApp (Khalid, June 27, 2019).

Economic mobility for young people in Kabaria is migrating to Europe to attain “work papers,” (*awrāq al-‘amal*). This is often just shortened to “papers” (*awrāq*). Illegal migration is so common in these areas that *awrāq* has been transformed into a verb. So, in Arabic, “to be papered” (*warrāq*) was a common answer when asking people what they wanted to do for work (Bakr, June 7, 2019). There are two ways to achieve these papers – to either 1) be granted legal work status by the municipality in the foreign country where they had moved to, or 2) by marrying a local national. The latter category is the more desired, so much so that papers is not just a reference to one’s work papers but can be used to refer to someone’s foreign-born wife. There is a popular joke using the word “papers” to refer to a European wife: a young Tunisian man marries an elderly Italian woman in order to get his work papers in Italy. After several years of marriage, he brings her to Tunisia to visit his family. As they are walking down the street in his neighbourhood, the wife trips on a loose stone and falls to the ground. An observer at

a nearby café shouts to the man: “Hey, look out! You dropped your papers” (Bakr, June 7, 2019).

The phenomenon of migration is so well known in Kabaria that it was covered by a 2015 documentary on illegal migration from Tunisia to the Italian city of Padova. The documentary featured 6-12 Tunisians in Padova, almost all of whom are from Kabaria. The film focuses on the life of these Tunisians in Padova who talk about why they left home: “I did not run away because I was poor,” explained one person in the film, “I ran away because of a prison sentence” (Bacha, 2015, 10’02”). Another was involved in the sale of drugs and had a brother in prison in Tunisia: “I call [my family] via phone,” he explains, “I have a brother in prison. He is always in prison, and when he is released, he only stays in the street for one month and then returns back to prison” (*ibid*, 40’25”).

The migration mobility pathway worked like this: Kabarians would earn money working in Europe, return to Kabaria with some money saved, and use that money as start-up capital to open a café, purchase inventory for a business, make connections to trade in smuggled goods, or even build an apartment building and become a landlord. Why Kabarians could do this, as opposed to those from Douar Hicher, will become evident in the next section of this chapter. But this process of bringing foreign capital into Kabaria meant it had several advantages over other neighbourhoods. People would come to Kabaria because it had the largest used car parts market in Tunisia. Kabaria’s market quarter thrived due to a large and cheap produce market – Kabaria straddled several north-south highways that connected Tunis to the country’s agricultural hinterland. Many other second-hand or smuggled goods were on sale in Kabaria, thanks

to the foreign contacts and imported foreign capital that returning migrants would bring home in the summer months.

Figure 6.2 A Busy Market Quarter in Kabaria



Source: photo taken by author on June 23, 2019.

6.1.3 Differences between Douar Hicher and Kabaria

One of the key differences between Kabaria and Douar Hicher was the extent to which a strong, informal social hierarchy emerged in Kabaria while it failed to do so in Douar Hicher. The main reason why that social hierarchy formed in Kabaria and not in Douar Hicher was the development of wealthy suburbs on Kabaria's outskirts. The development of the "El Mourouj" suburban community south of Kabaria meant that those who first moved to Kabaria stayed in Kabaria. The lack of new in-migrants, and developing inter-generational relations between families in Kabaria, meant that Kabaria had a stronger social hierarchy than Douar Hicher. Before the revolution, this hierarchy

helped organize local economic pursuits (i.e., pool resources and information for migration to Europe). After the revolution, as Section 6.2 will describe, this hierarchy protected residents in the absence of well-functioning state security services.

El Mourouj is an upper middle class mixed residential and commercial settlement first planned by the municipality of Tunis in the 1980s, with the first section finished in 1990 (Chabbi and Abid, 2008). By 2007, 90,000 people were living in El Mourouj, and the municipality extended a train line to El Mourouj running from downtown Tunis and through Kabaria. The development of El Mourouj was crucial for Kabarians. First, it meant that Kabaria could not expand outward into the countryside. In Douar Hicher, the growth of informal settlements on the outskirts of the neighbourhood meant that property values remain low. Because settlements could grow outward into cheap country land outside Douar Hicher, demand for housing was elastic, with the option to expand outward keeping prices low. As a result, if you are poor and want to relocate to Greater Tunis, Douar Hicher remains an attractive destination to the present day. In Kabaria, however, the development of El Morouj meant that housing supply was restricted and thus the cost of buying or renting in Kabaria rose over time. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the influx of outsiders into Douar Hicher meant that, after the revolution, AST could move into the neighbourhood and take advantage of its relatively limited forms of social hierarchy. Whereas in Kabaria, people eventually stopped moving into the neighbourhood from rural regions by the 1990s as the El Mourouj project was starting. This helped families earn equity on their homes and, importantly, build strong

social ties that helped the community self-govern in the absence of state security services following the revolution (Hassan, March 2, 2020).

Figure 6.3 The “El Mourouj” Development South of Kabaria



Source: Taken by author on June 23, 2019. Note the Tunis Metro visible in the background.

As a result of rising housing prices in Kabaria after the El Mourouj development, in-migration to Kabaria slowed, which meant that families in Kabaria could control and govern a neighbourhood whose make-up and dynamics did not change dramatically over time. These families have “know each other since the 1960s,” explained Hassan, Kabaria’s delegate to the Tunisian municipality, “we grew up with each other and this connection was passed down to the next generation” (Hassan, March 2, 2020).

The development of El Mourouj was part of a broader plan to build Greater Tunis outward rather than upward. In 1975, the city population of Tunis in 1975 was 963,000 people with a population density of 10,100 people per square kilometre. By 2002, the

population of Tunis had doubled, but the physical dimensions of the city had grown by more than twice its previous size. This meant that Tunis' population density had declined between 1975 and 2002, from 10,100 people per square kilometre to 9,000 (Chabbi and Abid, 2008). Douar Hicher remained part of Tunis' largest and least regulated residential neighbourhood during this outward expansion, while Kabaria benefitted greatly from the planned suburban development to its south.

Not only did Kabaria's residents build strong ties over time, but many initially moved to the neighbourhood from specific regions in the Tunisian hinterland. Some took the name of the region they came from, such as the Beja family from the Beja governorate that settled in Hay Ennour (See Figure 6.1 for a map of Kabaria). Other families had names that indicated their itinerant status – the Ayyari family (Ayyar meaning vagabond) was one of the first to settle in old Kabaria. Other families that moved to the oldest parts of Kabaria included the Jlass family (from Kairouan), Frachiche (from Kasserine), and Thalith (from Sfax). There is less territorial control over each part of the city where these families settled, according to most interviewed, however "If someone from one of those places [another neighbourhood in Kabaria] wants to cross through [our part of] Kabaria, they call a friend who helps them cross" explained one resident from Zargayouna, the original neighbourhood of Kabaria (Wael, February 29, 2020).

The social hierarchy evident in Kabaria – mainly provided through large families, a lack of resettlement, and several generations growing up together – protected the community after the revolution and anchored economic opportunities for young residents. As mentioned before, the main pathway for economic mobility in Kabaria is

to find work in Europe and return with some savings to Kabaria. Starting in the 1980s, Fadel explained, “the kids grow up in Kabaria and they have one goal – go to Italy and make money through selling drugs. We get into fights and sell drugs and get arrested in Kabaria. Our mentality at the time was ‘why do this in Tunisia when we can do the same in Europe and make money?’” (Fadel, March 5, 2020)

While the desire to reach Europe is prevalent in other Hūma neighbourhoods in Tunis, the difference in Kabaria is that strong family ties help young people make the journey. Older generations are expected to help younger ones migrate illegally to Europe: “In general, it is a family project,” explained Amir of finding work in Europe. “The family will get together to support someone to go to Italy by helping him raise the money and by finding a ‘good line’ [a safe route]” (Amir, March 1, 2020). Abbas explained how his brother smuggled himself into Italy in 2008 after having a disagreement with their father. “He got a visa, and he now has a family in Italy,” Abbas explained, “he has not kept up contact. I am sure I will go to Italy soon and I when I find him I will fight him – you do not just leave your family and not keep in contact with them” (Abbas, March 1, 2020). The family supports its members to reach Europe because they believe it is an investment, explained Wael, “There are a lot of models of success in Kabaria. The families are supporting that journey of going to Italy. The mother can sell her jewellery and gold to finance that trip to Italy. There is a return on that investment” (Wael, March 4, 2020).

The extent to which the migration of Kabarians to Europe was ordered and organized by coordinated family efforts was also evident in the number of people who

returned. Every adult male interviewed in Kabaria for this dissertation had either himself worked illegally in Europe for several years or had a family member who had done so. Illegal migration was a pathway for mobility in Kabaria, with many models and success stories. “I have a high school diploma in multimedia, and I am a rap artist,” explained Amir, a young resident of Kabaria who was planning to migrate without a visa to Europe. “I applied for a state grant to help me with my music, and they told me I need 7,000 dinars (£1,832) to put up as collateral to support a loan they’d give me to set up a studio. I said if I had 7,000 dinars I would have already left the country” (Amir, March 1, 2020).

6.1.4 Conclusion - Comparing Kabaria and Douar Hicher Before Tunisia’s Revolution

By combining structural conditions from Chapter Four with observations in Tunisia in Chapters Five and Six, this dissertation can summarize some of the key factors that hubs of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment appear to share in common. Chapter Four found that hubs generally formed in areas with a political opportunity, higher rates of university-educated unemployment, and relatively higher levels of monthly household spending. Building on these findings, chapters Five and Six presented how a political opportunity was a necessary but insufficient condition for hubs to emerge. In Tunisia, that opportunity was present nationwide but there was distinct subnational variation where hubs actually formed. Chapter Five also highlighted two other factors that contributed to Douar Hicher being taken over by AST and eventually turned into an ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hub: limited social hierarchy and political, social, and economic isolation. Chapter Six found that Kabarians faced similar social, political, and

economic isolation from the rest of Tunis as residents did from Douar Hicher. But Kabarians had a stronger social hierarchy than Douar Hicher. Not only did this hierarchy order economic opportunity for young residents, but, as we will see in Section 6.2, this hierarchy mobilized to protect the community during and after the revolution.

6.2 Conditions in Kabaria After Tunisia's Revolution

6.2.1 Kabaria After Tunisia's Revolution

The revolution in Tunisia dismantled the state security architecture and created a governance vacuum in many parts of Tunisia, such as Douar Hicher, that AST eventually filled (Zelin, 2020). It took years for the state security apparatus to recover its normal function after the overthrow of the Ben Ali government in 2011 (Jebnoun, 2017). Popular protests during the revolution in Douar Hicher and Kabaria resulted in violent clashes with state security. Residents in Kabaria and Douar Hicher burned down police stations and pushed out the nexus of security services and politburos that sustained the Tunisian dictatorship for decades (Khalid, June 20, 2019). In response to the chaos during and shortly after the revolution, residents in Douar Hicher and in Kabaria organized local neighbourhood watch groups. But whereas Salafi-Jihadist groups co-opted these local protection groups in Douar Hicher, in Kabaria, families of the neighbourhood supported them. These families were connected to each other through intermarriage and strengthened by the intergenerational relationships developed in the neighbourhoods they first settled in after moving to Kabaria from the Tunisian countryside. These cross-family bonds provided an informal social hierarchy that

prevented a security and governance vacuum in Kabaria of which AST could take advantage. “We secured our own neighbourhood,” explained Abbas, “other neighbourhoods were calling for help from military police, but we were the only neighbourhood that didn’t request help from anyone else...To a man we defended our neighbourhood” (Abbas, March 1, 2020). “We have big families living with each other and connected to each other,” explained Hassan, the delegate, “this was so useful and helpful during the revolution when the police station was burned” (March 2, 2020).

After the revolution, much like in Douar Hicher, hundreds of criminals from Kabaria were released from prison (Khalid, May 2, 2019). But many of them tried to leave for Italy rather than participate in the AST movement. In the first years after Tunisia’s revolution, there was a spike in illegal migration to Europe, which meant that many people who might have otherwise joined AST were particularly motivated in Kabaria to take advantage of the temporary lapse in state security to secure cheap passage to Europe. “The prisons were basically opened up and many inmates were released,” explained Khalid, a social worker who had worked in Kabaria for more than ten years, “A lot of the people from Kabaria who were locked up and left the prison during this time fled to Italy” (May 2, 2019). Neji agreed: “In the period after 2011 when security forces weren’t the best, basically all of Kabaria went to Italy” (Neji, February 29, 2020). It was clear that, for the people of Kabaria, the message of AST wasn’t as persuasive as their old models of economic and social advancement: “a lot of people [in Kabaria] were curious when they heard the narrative of Salafi-Jihadism - they focus on the end of days and the Armageddon that is happening in Syria,” explained Wael,

“But then if you tell them there is a line to go to Italy, they would chose the line to Italy. This is the identity of people [in Kabaria]” (February 29, 2020).

6.2.2 AST’s Post-Revolution Recruitment Campaign in Kabaria

AST tried and failed to establish a hub of foreign fighter recruitment in Kabaria. This was an important stress test of the comparison between Douar Hicher and Kabaria. AST tried to do in Kabaria what they had done in Douar Hicher and failed, which means this study can control for AST interest in both cases and learn more about the counterfactuals to a hub forming. According to Aaron Zelin’s database of AST activity, shared with the author, the group frequently held events in both Douar Hicher and Kabaria (see Table 6.1).

The table, compiled from events that AST publicized on its website and via social media, shows that Kabaria was important for AST. AST shared 21 events it held in Douar Hicher from 2011-2013, and it shared 11 events in Kabaria during this time. This may not necessarily mean that there were more actual AST activities in Douar Hicher than Kabaria, but rather that there were more activities publicized in the main outlets for AST propaganda that Zelin collected (Zelin, August 2, 2019). At the very least, it is clear from AST propaganda activities that they tried to recruit in Kabaria. Kabaria was one of the top 20 out of 266 delegations in Tunisia for AST recruitment events.

Table 6.1 Top 20 Delegations in Tunisia by Number of AST Events

Rank	Governorate Name	Delegation Name	Number of AST Events (2011-13)
1	Tunis	El Ouardia	40
2	Tunis	Cité El Khadra	35
3	Kairouan	Kairouan Sud	34
4	Bizerte	Menzel Bourguiba	28
5	Ariana	Soukra	25
6	Siliana	El Krib	22
7	Monastir	Jammel	22
8	Manouba	Douar Hicher	21
9	Tunis	Le Kram	20
10	Sidi Bouzid	Sidi Bouzid Ouest	19
11	Nabeul	Hammamet	18
12	Bizerte	Mateur	18
13	Nabeul	Beni Khia	17
14	Tunis	El Omrane Supérieur	15
15	Tunis	Sijoumi	14
16	Nabeul	Kelibia	12
17	Tunis	El Kabaria	11
18	Sousse	Kalaâ Kebira	11
19	Kebili	Kebili Nord	11
20	Mahdia	Mahdia	11
<i>Subtotal AST events from above</i>			404
<i>Subtotal events by known location</i>			721
<i>Total events including unknown location</i>			873

Source: data collect by Aaron Zelin and shared with author; data collection method discussed in Zelin, 2020;

Note: only the four delegations listed in above had 11 events.

One particularly noteworthy fact about the list of AST activities in Kabaria is that Kamal Zarrouk, popular recruiter, a gifted orator, and a senior figure in AST, attended many events there. In all AST activities, Zarrouk is listed 26 times. He appears in Kabaria five times, more than almost any other region in Tunisia (Zelin, 2020). Even though Zarrouk was not from this neighbourhood – he was from Jebel Ahmar, another working class suburb of Greater Tunis – his background as an ideologue and former criminal from Greater Tunis would have made him the ideal candidate to find new recruits in Kabaria. His criminal history, combined with his jihadist credentials (he had fought with Al Qaeda in Iraq), might have also helped him build strong ties with the dozens of Kabarian residents who were released from prison (Nadia, February 20, 2019).

According to Kabarians, AST recruiters tried to convince residents to join through a small number of public activities such as public proselytization and activism in the neighbourhood (i.e., public charity events). “Their [AST’s] influence was in the first wave of tents and da’wa [proselytization]” explained Wael, “Everyone had this feeling of redemption – wanting to pray after the revolution” (February 29, 2020). “The first reaction of people [in Kabaria] was curiosity,” explained Neji, “before 2011 no one was speaking about religion and political issues – it was something that was deeply prohibited. When the first wave of freedom came from the revolution, they [residents from Kabaria] tried to get to know it better. They wanted to hear new voices, religious voices” (February 29, 2020). One common statement among residents of Kabaria reflecting on this period of initial AST efforts to proselytize in Kabaria is that most were not residents of Kabaria: “we could see that they were from outside because everyone knows everyone from the neighbourhood and we did not recognize their faces,” explained Wael, “in every house there is at least one child in Italy. That’s the main thing – they [residents of Kabaria] know that missing people in the neighbourhood are not living outside the community but outside the country” (Wael, February 29, 2020). “After the revolution, when someone comes from outside, people will know immediately,” explained Amir, “there was some recruitment by [Jihadi] Salafi guys in Kabaria, but they were mainly from outside the neighbourhood and they were not really accepted in the neighbourhood” (Amir, March 1, 2020). “A lot of people in Kabaria are suspicious of outsiders and thought there was something tricky going on” when AST started trying to recruit residents, explained Neji (February 29, 2020).

Figure 6.4 ISIS Graffiti Still Visible in Kabaria



Source: photo taken by author on June 23, 2019. On the outskirts of the Belediye quarter in Kabaria. ISIS logos in the centre and left are scratched out; the “Vandals” graffiti on the right is for a soccer support group.

AST’s main recruitment strategy was, like in Douar Hicher, to approach Kabaria residents and recruit them in the mosque. A small number of AST supporters came to Kabaria to speak with locals who frequented the mosque about AST beliefs. “When they [AST adherents] came to Kabaria, they stayed for a period to understand the type of profile to focus on,” explained Neji, “the people [with AST] were making these profiles because they were living in the mosque – they were living, eating, and staying in the mosque” (February 29, 2020). Wael added that the mosque, which, like in Douar Hicher, played an outsized role in community organizing, “became a camp for these guys who were looking to recruit. They were looking for faces [of people] who were clearly angry with issues and were trying to convince them to come to the mosque and spend time with them” (Wael, February 29, 2020). Residents in Kabaria recall in the first year that AST adherents would look for recruits similar to the way they had in Douar Hicher: people who were alone, who looked angry, lonely, or bored, and who may have been

facing serious issues. AST recruiters would look for these people in the streets or in the mosques, and approach them with the intention of trying to solve their problems.

Figure 6.5 Salama and Malek Ibn Anas Mosques, Kabaria



Residents were threatened at knife point by AST in the Salama mosque (L). In the Malek Ibn Anas mosque (R), AST members tried to pressure the imam to leave. Source: L, author, April 30, 2019; R, Ali Hamlaoui, May 5, 2019).

The problem for AST in the case of Kabaria is that, unlike in Douar Hicher, this Salafi-Jihadist group was unable to take control of the mosques or the streets. The imams in Kabaria were not necessarily well-trained, but they were longstanding members of the community and they were respected. They did not suffer as much reputational damage as the imams did in Douar Hicher due to the latter's role as government informants for the former regime. "The imams at the two mosques near Houmt el Marché [see Figure 6.5 above] were the same and they've been around for a long time," explained Abbas, a resident of the quarter. "The imams are old imams...they are elders in the community who are very well-respected" (Abbas, March 1, 2020). AST tried to capture the main mosques of Kabaria but could not remove the imams or coerce residents into supporting a new leader who they tried to install. In one of the mosques of the Houmt el Marché area of Kabaria, the Salama mosque, AST adherents carried

knives with them to intimidate the imam and the elders of the community. They would force their way into the front of the mosque and try to position themselves as prayer leaders, explained Abdelnour (March 3, 2020). “They were colonizing the mosque and fighting with local people with knives,” explained Wael, “they were trying to dominate the residents of Kabaria. And people knew that this group which was trying to dominate the neighbourhood from outside was inappropriate...so people started to just go spontaneously out of the movement, and they ignored the movement” (Wael March 5, 2020).

This local antagonism did not necessarily mean that AST failed to achieve any influence in Kabaria. Despite apparent disagreement between AST and residents of Kabaria, AST did establish a foothold in the Malek Ibn Anas mosque in Kabaria well into 2012. They invited a prominent Salafi scholar from Egypt, Wagdy Ghoneim, to give a guest lecture in the mosque in February 2012 (Neji, February 29, 2020). Images of the event from a popular and public Facebook group in Kabaria, the “Sons of Kabaria,” showed that it was well-attended and included attendants waving Salafi-Jihadi flags in the Malek Ibn Anas mosque (Sons of Kabaria, 2012a).

Although some residents claimed that AST recruiting efforts “disappeared before September 2012,” when protests erupted in front of the U.S. Embassy (Abbas, March 1, 2020), AST propaganda indicates that the group was active in the neighbourhood even later in 2012. Three days after a proselytization event in the marketplace of Kabaria in November 2012, in the heart of the Kabaria neighbourhood, Kamal Zarrouk apparently gave a lecture at the Salama mosque in Kabaria. “Some stars in their

movement were here,” explained Wael (March 1, 2020). In late 2012, in the Malek Ibn Anas mosque, according to Karim, a resident who attended the mosque and recalled the incident, the imam and several elders of the mosque confronted AST members and told them that they needed to leave (Karim, March 3, 2020). Although I tried to set up an interview with the imam to hear his story, he would not speak with me, and COVID restrictions on travel meant that I had to leave Tunisia on March 7, 2020 and could not return to build up enough trust to potentially conduct the interview.

AST appeared to use the Malek Ibn Anas mosque as a base of organization for charity events in other parts of Tunisia. The Sons of Kabaria Facebook group included an album showing a group of AST supporters wearing jackets from the “Malek Ibn Anas Mosque Organization” traveling to Dahmani in western Tunisia to deliver aid (Sons of Kabaria, 2012b). More important than charity work, AST also tried to take over public safety responsibilities by piggybacking off local efforts to protect the community after the revolution and transforming them into a Salafi-Jihadi project of religious-based law enforcement. As mentioned previously, local neighbourhood watch groups started forming after the revolution in Kabaria to protect residents and local businesses from looting (Allal, 2011). The Salafi-Jihadis of AST tried to co-opt these groups, especially since the police stations and the internal security apparatus of the previous regime had disappeared and the new Tunisian government post-revolution had yet to re-establish its police. As Neji recalled of AST’s efforts to take over the streets of Kabaria:

They were all wearing shari’a clothes, doing a kind of parallel police – going in a pick-up truck and driving around the neighbourhood just to prevent people from stealing and to not allow people to drink alcohol or smoke weed. That kind of Islamic police. But they didn’t succeed to do it

for a long time, basically because we are not like Douar Hicher – which is not just a popular area but a new area. In those new areas, they have a rural mindset, whereas we have a more resilient mindset. People here are more evolved in drug selling and drug consuming that it's become here part of the culture and part of the daily life that you cannot easily change" (March 1, 2020).

Amir also remembered AST's attempts after the revolution to patrol the streets of Kabaria: "we would not allow outsiders to police our streets," he explained, "the community did not succumb to this influence because we are very resilient and do not easily accept outsiders" (March 1, 2020).

Although AST failed to establish a recruitment hub in Kabaria, it did not mean that no one from Kabaria joined ISIS. But the difference was that the recruitment of Kabaria residents generally took place based on connections they developed outside the neighbourhood. One group of friends from Kabaria that may have been recruited to join ISIS made their connections to recruiters via membership in a soccer hooligan group known as the Ultras (Bakr, May 2, 2019). Another Kabarian recalled how his friend from the neighbourhood was recruited to join an infamous series of protests led by AST at Manouba University – a school near Douar Hicher – to force university administrators to reverse their ban on women wearing the face veil in school. The protests, which started at the end of November 2011, were a way for AST to exert influence and demonstrate its nationwide influence (Zelin, 2020). AST took advantage of the publicity surrounding their support for the demonstrations at the Manouba University to establish guards that would ostensibly protect women who were wearing the veil. As Zelin argued, the veil controversy, centred around the Manouba University, gave AST another opportunity "to

fill a vacuum” and “gain notoriety through its actions and recruit more individuals” (Zelin, 2020, p. 110).

Abbas’s friend from Kabaria was one of those individuals who went to the University of Manouba protests and “got involved in their movement by going to activities they were running in other places [other neighbourhoods in Tunis]” he explained (Abbas, March 1, 2020). His friend went to Syria in 2014 but returned and was caught and put in jail. He was released after a year in prison and then tried to smuggle himself across the border to Libya in 2016, where he was shot and killed by the Tunisian border police. “He was a smart guy and very good with computers,” Abbas explained, “but he had a lot of family issues. His family was very poor, and they were fighting a lot” (Abbas, March 1, 2020).

Despite one-off stories of recruitment like the Kabarians who joined via the Ultras or like Abbas’s friend, AST failed to establish a foothold in Kabaria, even though they clearly made a concerted effort. AST could not capture the mosques or the streets of Kabaria, which meant that they failed to transform Kabaria into a recruitment hub as they had done in Douar Hicher. AST had even appointed a “wālī” for Kabaria, a supposed “governor” who would represent AST in Kabaria and who would supervise AST’s recruitment and proselytization activities (Wassim, June 30, 2019). However, because AST’s influence over Kabaria was so minimal, the wālī’s job of “governing” the neighbourhood was far less complex than in places like Douar Hicher. In Kabaria, the wālī was “appointed as a coordinator for mostly mosque activities,” explained Wael, “but since they didn’t control the streets, this person was more like a coordinator for people

who come to the mosque. It wasn't like an emir who controlled the neighbourhood outside the mosque" (February 29, 2020).

6.3 Conclusion: Why a Hub in Douar Hicher and not Kabaria?

With the exception of small-scale activities in the Salama and Malek Ibn Anas mosques, AST failed to transform Kabaria into a recruitment hub. "It wasn't like a shoot-out at the O.K. Corral as you might think from your movies," explained Karim, from the Hay Ennour area, "people just ignored the group, and they realized they couldn't get a foothold in Kabaria, so they left" (March 3, 2020). Karim's point – that the group tried, failed to gain recruits, and quietly left, was echoed by all the residents with whom I spoke. People did not need to confront AST for the most part – they were mostly ignored, save for several confrontations, and eventually they just left.

But why did they leave Kabaria, and why were they so much more successful in transforming Douar Hicher into one of Tunisia's most active recruitment hubs for AST, and later for ISIS? The key reason why AST struggled to recruit in Kabaria was because the neighbourhood had a more defined social hierarchy before the revolution. This neighbourhood had greater social cohesion mainly because rural-urban migrants stopped arriving in this neighbourhood roughly two decades ago. As a result of fewer new residents, families grew and intermarried, creating large, strong, kin-based social networks that could ensure a greater level of social hierarchy than Douar Hicher. Kabaria also benefitted from being close to wealthier neighbourhoods around Tunis. This mattered because it not only offered residents greater economic opportunities, but it

also drove greater state investment and development to the area as a whole. This provided residents of Kabaria with easier access to things like public transportation, which in turn improved property values and thus made Kabaria too expensive for new in-migrants to settle there as they have done in Douar Hicher. This process of Greater Tunis's outward expansion created other poorly planned, large working-class suburbs that were discussed in Chapter Three when considering alternative neighbourhoods similar to Douar Hicher. These neighbourhoods, such as Sidi Hassine, Ettadhamen, Mohammedia, Fouchana, and others, would also later become ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs in Greater Tunis.

Table 6.2 Conditions for Salafi-Jihadi Movements in Douar Hicher and Kabaria

Factors:	Data indicators (Level):	Factor - Expected Outcome (Douar Hicher):	Factor- Expected Outcome (Kabaria):
1. National Political Opportunity (Present or Absent):	- State security effectiveness (low) - Crime rates (high)	Present	Present
2. Local Social Hierarchy (Extensive or Limited):	-Rates of in-migration (low) -Presence of civic groups or other community-based organizations (low)	Limited	Extensive
3. Economic Involvement (Integrated or Isolated):	-Rate of informal homes (high) -Unemployment rates (high) -Voter turnout rates (low) -Educational attainment rates (low)	Isolated	Isolated
Outcome	- AST Activity (High) - ISIS recruitment (High/Low)	Became an ISIS recruitment hub	Did not become a recruitment hub

Source: developed by the author

Table 6.2 contains the same categories from the previous chapter but also includes Kabaria to allow for more direct comparisons with Douar Hicher. What is clear is that the national political opportunity was a necessary but insufficient condition for AST to emerge. Locally, there needed to also be an opportunity, in the form of limited social hierarchy that allowed AST to govern in lieu of the state in one place and not another.

Like Douar Hicher, Kabaria was politically isolated from the central government. Its residents do not have adequate political representation at the national level, and no residents from this working-class neighbourhood have participated in national-level politics before the 2010-11 revolution or after. Kabaria residents dismiss political activity as not having an effect on their lives. Even Hassan, the delegate from Kabaria, complained that political leaders only visit Kabaria when they need their vote, not before or after (Hassan, March 2, 2020).

However isolated Kabarians were from the rest of Tunis, internally they were socially cohesive. This cohesion helped anchor economic opportunities, for example creating a ladder of mobility in which families helped young members raise money to travel illegally to Europe. While there, the mostly young men could earn money before returning home to start businesses. Or some would remain overseas and send money home to their families as remittances, which allowed other family members to buy enough inventory to open a shop. The neighbourhood was active in black and grey markets, and the cohesiveness of the community meant that they were able to successfully protect these businesses by closing ranks and remaining suspicious of

outsiders. Their culture of suspicion of outsiders, born from a strong local identity and a cohesive social hierarchy, would help Kabarians prevent their neighbourhood from becoming a hub of AST activity.

Kabaria's informal social hierarchy might be considered a success story – Kabaria was one of the few neighbourhoods with its socioeconomic profile to prevent Salafi-Jihadist recruitment in Greater Tunis. In Kabaria, instead, this social structure likely facilitated criminal activity like drug sales and illegal migration to Europe. That Kabaria was a centre of organized criminal activity suggests one additional avenue of research worth further investigation: the relationship between criminal activity and transnational insurgent recruitment. Some research has pointed to the “crime-terror nexus” – an overlapping of criminal groups and terrorist recruitment networks – with a focus most recently on foreign fighter recruits with criminal records (i.e., Basra and Neumann, 2016; Ljubic et al., 2017). However, evidence from Kabaria seems to contradict this thesis. Although there were many residents of Kabaria with criminal records, including many released from prison in 2011 after a general amnesty, few to none were recruited to become foreign fighters. There may therefore be other factors confounding the relationship between criminality and transnational insurgency, but these require further study. For example, if the criminal activity in Kabaria was well organized – and this dissertation does not provide definitive evidence in favour or against – then it may be that organized crime and transnational militancy are substitutes at the organizational level, while complements at the level of individual recruits. That may help explain why organized criminal networks in Kabaria were resistant to AST recruitment – they profited

from the weakness of Tunisia's security services after the revolution and did not want to change it.

Although Douar Hicher and Kabaria resemble one another in many other ways, the absence of the state – the lone power broker in Douar Hicher – created an opportunity for a group like AST to emerge and thrive. Meanwhile, Kabaria had a governance alternative to the state: an informal social structure which protected the neighbourhood, resolved disputes, and organized black and grey markets amid the political disruption caused by the revolution. This social hierarchy led many residents to see AST's efforts to capture the neighbourhood as a campaign waged by outsiders to take over Kabaria. Although initially curious about AST's mission, and although AST did make modest inroads into the Kabaria community, the group could not change the fundamental social structure of Kabaria or capture its mosques and streets as it had in Douar Hicher.

Residents in Kabaria expressed pride in coming from their neighbourhood. They felt like being from Kabaria meant that they were strong and tough. Kabarians have also adopted a culture of resourcefulness. Unlike the *muhamashīn* ("disenfranchised") (Merone and Cavatorta, 2013, p. 316) described in Chapter Five, residents of Kabaria appeared more resourceful. This is, in part, a product of the social cohesion in the community, allowing for more investment in new ideas even when the formal banking system seemed inaccessible. The famous car parts market in Kabaria grew from a market in goods to a market in services – now mechanics gather in Kabaria and people go there to fix their cars as well. Recently, "Wallyscar," a Tunisian car manufacturer,

opened a factory in Kabaria. Meanwhile, Kabarians pioneered the practice where residents would travel the city and collect recyclable plastic which they would sell to the state ("Birbasha"). The practice became so successful that it is now a full-time job paid by the state to people all over Greater Tunis. Thus, even though Kabarians were just as excluded from formal employment and trade as those from Douar Hicher, they have found creative ways of starting new businesses that have grown over time.

CHAPTER 7 | Douar Hicher - Part II

Becoming an ISIS Foreign Fighter in Douar Hicher

“Everywhere, young imams went sniffing out resentment, invading people’s consciousness and forging minds to suit their purpose. They could be seen in the cafes, schools and health clinics, and even on staircases...a mere whimper and the followers heaped their sympathy on you, then, without warning, you found yourself in the hands of the architects of Salvation.”

- Yasmina Khadra, *Wolf Dreams*, 2003, p. 106

Introduction

In March 2012, then-Interior Minister Ali La’arayedh argued at an executive council meeting of Tunisia’s ruling Ennahda party that the government needed to “prepare for a fight” with the Salafi-Jihadi movement in Tunisia because they posed a national security threat (La’arayedh, July 3, 2019; Oussama Sghaier, June 11, 2019). By this time, Salafi-Jihadis were not merely ex-convicts and religious radicals preaching in politically isolated neighbourhoods. They were part of an organized and unified political organization with as many as 100,000 active members (Zelin, August 3, 2019). Despite La’arayedh’s warning, other leaders in Ennahda, a conservative religious political party, overruled him. Rather than a threat, they believed AST could moderate if convinced to participate in Tunisian politics. “We understand democracy not just as a tool of government but also of education,” explained Ennahda party leader Rachid Ghannouchi in an interview later in 2012, “through democracy, they [Salafi-Jihadis] will slowly be part of this democracy, rather than destroying it” (Fisk, 2012).

Chapter Seven describes how AST transformed from a social movement into an underground militant organization whose members eventually became ISIS foreign fighters. Using Douar Hicher as a setting for this evolution, this chapter weaves together two transformations that eventually led Salafi-Jihadis from Douar Hicher and across Tunisia to join ISIS in Syria: first, the transformation of the individual from recruit to ideologue, and second, the transformation of AST from a political organization to a protest movement and from protest movement to an insurgency. Evidence presented in this chapter supports the conclusion that the shift of AST and many of its members from a local Salafi-Jihadi group to an engine of foreign fighter recruitment for ISIS was not a foregone conclusion, but rather the result of a sequence of key decisions and the product of hardening in-group identities emerging from reciprocal obligations of group members. In the process, this chapter makes clear that ISIS foreign fighters were not recruited from the centre out (i.e., through propaganda or outreach by ISIS officials), but joined from the outside in (i.e., based on situational factors in their countries of origin).

The first transformation that took place during recruitment was a personal one: individuals changed over time – from joining AST (7.1) to becoming increasingly active in the group's ideological indoctrination as members (7.2). The second transformation was an organizational one. It was not a foregone conclusion that AST leadership would shift from a political organization to an armed insurgency. Just as recruits grew more committed to each another, AST evolved from a political organization to a protest campaign (7.3.1), and from a protest campaign to an underground militant organization (7.3.2). Once AST was designated formally as a terrorist organisation by the Tunisian

government, many started leaving Tunisia to join ISIS in Syria as foreign fighters (7.3.3 and 7.3.4).

In hindsight, the progression of AST from a social movement to a facilitator of ISIS foreign fighters seems linear. But as the final section of this chapter demonstrates, AST's transformations were far from guaranteed (7.4). They changed based on certain choices made by a small number of individuals at key moments of indeterminacy. By 2013, these choices eventually led to AST become an underground militant organisation which helped many members to fight abroad. AST's evolution changed individual members' in-group identity, transforming the attitudes of many members who had initially joined out of curiosity about the role of religion in public life into ISIS foreign fighters.

7.1 Joining AST

7.1.1 What Recruitment Was Like in a Hub

Chapter Five elaborated on how the hub in Douar Hicher formed. This section describes how this hub of Salafi-Jihadism operated once formed to recruit more members. While some residents in Douar Hicher travelled directly to Syria despite minimal contact with AST, the most common pathway to becoming a foreign fighter was more gradual: first, members from Douar Hicher joined AST and became indoctrinated into Salafi-Jihadism. As members, they became more committed to their group identity and more indoctrinated into the ideology of Salafi-Jihadism until the time arrived when they believed joining ISIS was a safe choice and even the logical extension

of their own beliefs. As a result, the beginning of this chapter focuses not on how Salafi-Jihadis from Douar Hicher got to Syria, but on how so many got involved in their neighbourhood's Salafi-Jihadi network to begin with.

This section describes how people were recruited to AST in four parts: the first discusses how recruitment relied on in-person contacts, rather than online connections. The second part of this section explains how recruiters could build a file about potential recruits before ever approaching them and then how they used that information to approach potential recruits at the right time. The third part of this section outlines how other recruits joined the movement through its proselytization effort, and how, after they were involved in AST, the organization filtered and promoted members who were more loyal, active, and who had potentially useful skills. The fourth part of this section explains how the goal of the first approach was to convince a potential recruit to meet in a semi-private space where other members would congregate. Because AST had captured nearly all of Douar Hicher's mosques, this was the ideal setting to convince potential recruits for follow up meetings.

First, recruitment in Douar Hicher was almost exclusively in-person rather than online. Bakr was a researcher of foreign fighter recruitment for the Tunisian government. He described how in-person recruitment was common among Salafi-Jihadis in working class neighbourhoods, but online recruitment was more prevalent in middle class and wealthier neighbourhoods (Bakr, June 9, 2019). Mostafa, who himself had been detained twice trying to reach Syria, confirmed that it was much easier to talk to people in person in a working-class neighbourhood like Douar Hicher where "everyone knows

everyone.” Moreover, Mostafa continued, if he were stopped by police, authorities could make him unlock his phone and show them all of his text messages, including via WhatsApp or Facebook messenger. And police would arrest someone just for downloading on his or her phone an encrypted communications application like Signal or Telegram. This made digital communication more vulnerable to government detection and surveillance; and since Salafi-Jihadis already controlled Douar Hicher anyway, it was far safer and more reliable to talk in-person (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

Second, before even approaching a potential recruit, recruiters would often “make a profile” of him or her (Chaima, June 28, 2019; Marwan, June 10, 2019). Because Douar Hicher is such a tight-knit community, it was easy for recruiters to gather lots of information about potential recruits through collaborators in the neighbourhood. By collecting information this way, recruiters could build a profile of each potential recruit, knowing what issues might motivate them to join, how to approach them, how likely they were to join AST, and how loyal they might be once a member of the group. Even when recruiters approached strangers, they could easily find common ground based on their shared experience of growing up in Douar Hicher (i.e., discrimination, police harassment, personal or family hardship). Because this recruitment campaign felt personalized, it was very persuasive: friend networks of as many as 30 people joined AST and eventually went to Syria (Mostafa, June 19, 2019; Mohsen, June 22, 2019). A survey of several hundred youth from Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen found that 81 percent of young people said they knew at least one person who went to fight in Syria (International Alert, 2015).

Recruiters would use the information they had collected about potential recruits to choose the right moment to approach them. Sulayman, whose brother would eventually be killed on the battlefield in Syria while fighting alongside ISIS in early 2014, explained how his brother had just recently witnessed the death of a close friend. Recruiters knew he was traumatized by the experience and offered him the chance to talk about it. They also suggested he visit the mosque to pray for his deceased friend. Later, when they found out about his brother's drug use, they encouraged him to pray to "save" his brother too. "Only God knows when our time will be up in this world," they explained (Sulayman, June 12, 2019).

Chaima described how her father had just been diagnosed with a mental disorder after experiencing a particularly acute psychological episode. "One day" during this period, she explained, "my father brought a man to our house to convince him to participate in jihad. The man looked like an angel – he had a nice voice, good hygiene, and he made sitting with him so easy and comfortable. He told my father that he would be okay as long as he prayed to God. He told us stories from the Qur'an and cited its passages from memory. It was wonderful to hear it – I did not have any evidence to refute it" (Chaima, June 28, 2019).

After weeks of visits, Chaima's mother convinced her father to stop allowing this person to visit. But before her mother's intervention, Chaima recalled that her father was convinced to spend more time with this man. He had been praying in the mosque and growing a beard. Chaima's mother finally intervened when her father had tried to convince her mother to wear the full-face veil (Chaima, June 28, 2019). But once he

decided to leave the group, he found that quitting was not easy. By that point, members of the group beyond just the recruiter were pressuring him to join. Chaima's father had to confront these members in the neighbourhood and literally fight them off. When I asked her how the recruiter had known about her father, she answered: "we have a culture of everyone knows everyone. He knew my father had [mental] problems and approached him" (Chaima, June 28, 2019).

Third, recruiters did not always need to collect information about a potential recruit in advance; the movement grew so popular in Douar Hicher that AST were no longer recruiters, but filters. Their concern was no longer finding participants but selecting the right participants. Because Salafi-Jihadis controlled Douar Hicher, they could approach people who appeared interested and ask them to visit a certain mosque, at which point they could learn about the recruit by asking people in the neighbourhood about them (Bakr, June 7, 2019). There were many opportunities to do this. Recruiters would sometimes approach young men in the neighbourhood directly at local cafes where many gather (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013). There, young men would spend an entire day drinking coffee and sitting around – they could be recruited to the mosque at first out of sheer boredom (Omar, May 5, 2019). Other potential recruits interested in joining could show up in the places where AST members met. These places were known in Douar Hicher. According to Mostafa:

You'd go to the mosques where it was known that you'd get some information [about joining]. But you couldn't be forward and ask brothers about wanting to go because they were very good at avoiding infiltration...So you had to just go and pray every day and hope that they would eventually approach you. They wouldn't talk to you if you were a foreigner to the community. They needed to trust you. If they didn't

approach you, your choices were to look elsewhere or have a mediator vouch for you on your behalf (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

The logic of power shifted after the Salafi-Jihadis took over Douar Hicher, and this contributed to their attracting many recruits. Before the revolution, local gangs in Douar Hicher attracted kids who dropped out of high school and they would commit petty crimes and abuse drugs and alcohol (Omar, May 5, 2019). But after AST had taken over Douar Hicher, these groups disappeared. In their place, Salafi-Jihadis attracted many people from these crowds, people who had committed crimes and were released from prison after the revolution or who had sought protection from the police. “Every rascal had become a Salafi,” explained a military officer, “if I were a rascal, I would have done the same thing. Wearing a beard was a passport to immunity” (ICG, 2013, p. 21).

Another reason recruiters were so successful in Douar Hicher was because young people had so little to do (see previous discussion on unemployment). They had nowhere to go and nothing else to do but listen to these recruiters. Weekdays during work hours, local cafes are filled with young men. It was easy to speak to them there at any time. Often, recruiters would talk to them about issues that they could easily guess were on the top of their list – making money, avoiding police, or the injustice and unfairness of life. At the end of the conversation, recruiters would give these young people some money and ask them if they were available to participate in prayers at a nearby mosque.

Mariam, a mother of three sons, described living in constant fear of her sons becoming Salafi-Jihadis in just this way: “I am afraid when I call my son that he won’t

answer,” she explained, “It’s only when he enters the door that I am relieved” (Mariam, June 20, 2019). The social worker involved in a case involving one of Mariam’s sons explained that “Mariam’s son told me directly ‘if they offer money to me, I will join without thinking.’ Lots of people joined on the promises of being paid” (Alma, June 20, 2019).

Ibtesam, another mother in the same neighbourhood with two sons in their early 20s, described how this process worked in such detail that it was clear this was a major concern for her.

“The group [AST] had people specifically for recruitment. First they would buy him a coffee and they would speak about his life and then they would speak about religion. After that they would give him a small amount of money to buy coffee and not suffer. The net result was very good for this person. He will have a new friend, he will not have to worry about money for a little while, and he will learn something about his religion. Eventually, the person would ask ‘What do you want from me? Whatever you want me to do I will do it’” (Ibtesam, June 20, 2019).

Salafi-Jihadis also found people when they proselytized across the neighbourhood, setting up small tables and microphones where they would preach in front of high schools or neighbourhood squares for hours (Bakr, June 7, 2019). To attract attention, AST would set up proselytization booths in highly trafficked areas (i.e., central squares, outside of high schools, near construction sites) in neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher. This proselytization was extremely important for AST and all Salafi movements. It is called da‘wa, which is the act of calling or inviting people to Islam. In the case of these booths, the calls would be literal: preachers would set up under an open tent to call people to Salafi-Jihadism through a loudspeaker for hours each day.

Figure 7.1 shows one of the most highly trafficked squares in Douar Hicher. It is the terminus for the 56 bus, the only route that runs through Douar Hicher. The square was one of the central sites for AST proselytization and was also within 250 metres of the al-Nasr mosque, one of two headquarters for AST in Douar Hicher (that mosque was pictured in Figure 5.2).

Figure 7.1 One of the Central Squares for AST Proselytization in Douar Hicher



Source: photo taken by author on June 24, 2019

Fourth, regardless of the means of the initial approach, the goal of that first interaction between recruiter and recruit was almost always to convince the recruit to participate in prayers at a nearby mosque. Recruits were, if not practicing Muslims, almost universally socialized to respect the fact that Islam represented a set of moral beliefs (Atran, 2010a). This gave recruiters who would cite the Qur'an in their pitch an aura of authenticity that would strengthen their appeal. The fact that recruits self-identified to a certain extent as religious Muslims often created an opening to encourage

a potential recruit to attend prayers. But, according to Marwan, they would often find people who identified as Muslims but were not well-versed in Islam: “[m]ostly they go to people who don’t have a deep background of religious or even practical knowledge. So, if they came to me to convince me of joining, I can’t debate them or even fight them” (Marwan, June 10, 2019). This religious appeal was strengthened by the fact that the group controlled almost all the mosques in Douar Hicher. Once recruiters got a potential recruit to agree to pray at the mosque, they could continue their recruitment on territory they controlled, and with assistance from other like-minded members to bolster their pitch (Chaima, June 28, 2019; Sulayman, June 12, 2019).

Recruiters wanted to convince people to join them for a more private conversation in the nearby mosque. This was sometimes an innocuous request that masked their intention to recruit new members, and other times coded language that even their recruit would understand. By the time AST controlled Douar Hicher, getting selected was a distinction that bestowed prestige. It was an honour to join, and not everyone was admitted. Once a member, as will soon be described, people competed within the movement for further distinction by signalling their commitment in various ways, as some had done in order to be admitted. Because virtually all the mosques in the neighbourhood were part of their recruitment network, bringing a potential recruit to the mosque meant having conversation on terms that favoured the recruiter. Bringing the conversation away from the café or street corner – places that were familiar to a recruit – and into a semi-private space that was well-known to the recruiter and populated by many other Salafi-Jihadis was a successful tactic. Once in the mosque,

through a combination of persuasion, money, peer pressure, and religious appeals, many recruits would come back and become part of the movement (Marwan, June 10, 2019; Sulayman, June 12, 2019).

7.1.2 Why Recruitment in Hubs Was Successful

Recruitment in Douar Hicher was successful because the logic of participation expanded there. This section uses the example of AST recruitment in Douar Hicher to highlight three reasons why so many people are recruited in hubs. Hubs succeeded first because potential joiners had more reasons to join, second because recruiters could more effectively persuade recruits to join, and third because recruits had more opportunities to join. These reasons relate to the economies of scale mentioned earlier in the chapter. Local control for AST achieved scale effects – as it grew larger, the average cost of recruiting each additional member declined. Eventually, local norms surrounding reciprocity, and endogenously forming bonds built over shared experiences meant even people who joined for entirely self-serving reasons (i.e., to fund a business venture or to hide from the police) might adopt the same degree of ideological fervour and in-group attachment as they participated in group activities. Below, I explain in more detail the three reasons why hubs were such effective recruitment environments.

The first reason why hubs were so effective is there were more reasons to join. Places that became hubs of AST recruitment in Tunisia were places where the group exerted control over the levers of local governance. AST provided services like protection, religious instruction, and market access. Because this group was effectively

the police, joining could offer a potential recruit power or social status in the community. Or, conversely, joining could offer protection against state and local law enforcement. There were many other reasons for joining – power, social prestige, protection, and financial reward.

The second reason why potential recruits were more likely to join in a hub was because the recruitment pitch itself was so nuanced and individualized. This was easier to do in hubs than anywhere else. Hubs in Tunisia were places where “everyone knows everyone” (Chaima, Feb. 20, 2019). And, because the group was already collecting information on almost everyone in the neighbourhood as part of their police and protection function, it was even easier to identify and recruit residents with the greatest potential interest in joining the group. Recruiters could build a profile of each potential joiner, knowing what issues might motivate them, how to approach them, how likely they were to join, and how loyal they might be once a member of the group. Even when recruiters approached strangers, they could easily find common ground based on their shared experience of growing up in the same or similar neighbourhoods.

Third and finally, there were more “opportunities for deciding” to join the group (Oliver, 1989, p. 11). In the hub, people would see members of the group everywhere they went. They would see them in the mosque when they would attend prayer, they would see them promoting their group in all the major intersections of their neighbourhood, and they would see them enforcing dress codes or certain patterns of behaviour (Rosenblatt, 2019). They would even find out that some of their friends or

people they know had decided to join the group, which gave them another opportunity to consider joining.

Each of these three factors independent of one another would increase the probability of someone joining, all else being equal. But they also worked together to make it very easy for potential recruits to decide to join. There were more reasons and opportunities to join in a hub, and it was harder to resist recruitment. By 2012, AST was no longer recruiting new members – they did not need to. The interest in joining was so high among young people that recruiters were filtering out possible recruits to pick the most useful and loyal potential new members (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

7.2 Being a Member of AST

Once a member of AST, new recruits were encouraged to spend as much time as possible with other members of the group. AST filled members' time with activities every day, including religious study, proselytization, shared meals, charity work, even business ventures (Sulayman, June 12, 2019). These activities were designed to make sure recruits were constantly surrounded by other like-minded members, which reinforced their newly adopted Salafi-Jihadi beliefs and practices. Recruits often talked about how meaningful these friendships were: AST members would call each other “my brother under God” (al-Hajj Salem, 2014).

These strong bonds facilitated the indoctrination process because, as recruits spent less time with those who might disagree with them (i.e., family members and childhood friends), their beliefs grew more extreme (Berger, 2018). It also hardened

members' in-group solidarity, and this section will describe how the police raids into Douar Hicher drew members closer together. For AST, certain events caused members who may have initially joined out of curiosity about Islam to be willing to use more violent means to defend other members. The careful curriculum of indoctrination by AST during this time helped give members meaning to these risks. Members may have been willing to take risks for one another out of respect for the norms of reciprocity that influenced behaviour in Douar Hicher. But they were not initiated with this level of ideological commitment; that they developed over time.

Being a member of AST meant access to exclusive benefits only available to individuals who were active participants in the movement (Imad, July 3, 2019). These club goods were popular in places like Douar Hicher, where groups like AST performed better than the government at providing resources like protection, insurance, access to capital, and welfare (Buchanan, 1965; Berman and Laitin, 2008). As a religious organization in a tightly knit conservative community, AST also offered religious training and social prestige through its membership. This section describes how being a member provided such benefits, and how members competed over them through commitment tests designed to bring members closer into the group.

The most basic requirement for being a member was to show up to events, such as prayers, study groups, social events, planned activities and informal social gatherings. The more active you were, the more benefits you might receive (Aaron Zelin, August 4, 2019). Members of the group were always busy: an example of a daily schedule for an active AST member included attending dawn prayers (approximately

4:15am in Tunisia in the Fall season) followed by Qur'anic recitation lessons, after which were morning activities, such as to help one of the other adherents run his businesses. There was a break for mid-day prayers (roughly 12:30pm), followed by lunch. Afternoons might be set aside for special activities, such as proselytization, community or charity work, or social activities (i.e., football games). Those who had businesses would return to them. The group would meet again for afternoon prayer (roughly 4:10pm) followed by gatherings that would lead to the final two prayers of the day (roughly 7:30pm and 8:45pm), dinner, and lengthy debates into the night about religion and politics. Members could always meet at the mosque for these discussions, although by 2013, when the group was under greater surveillance by the state, more of the sensitive discussions took place in the private home of a trusted member or supporter (Imad, July 3, 2019).

The daily life of a Salafi-Jihadi in the hub of Douar Hicher was designed to be distinct. Being a member meant being different: for members, this felt special and was imbued with a sense of religious duty that brought members closer together. The rigid schedule, the norms of behaviour and dress, all brought a sense of normality and meaning, even harmony, into the everyday life of Salafi-Jihadis that many had never had before (al-Hajj Saleh, 2014). Members gave each other nicknames and used certain phrases to distinguish their speech. They dressed differently; wore special types of perfumes; styled their hair in specific ways; and were instructed to hold their right hand on top of their left while standing or talking as a sign of respect. Members would come to believe that they were following the behaviour of the Prophet Muhammed and his contemporary followers (al-Hajj Saleh, 2014).

According to Sulayman, these activities were designed to occupy his brother's time as much as possible (Sulayman, June 12, 2019). His brother's constant exposure to like-minded individuals replaced his closest relationships (i.e., with family like Sulayman) with new bonds to other members of the group. The net effect of occupying Sulayman's brother's time with other members was to reinforce his newly adopted worldview, making his indoctrination towards violent and extreme beliefs seem normal (i.e., a process described in Berger, 2018). It also drew Sulayman's brother away from interacting with people who were trying to convince him that the group's ideology was dangerous, including Sulayman. "I tried to explain [to him] that he was going down a road that would eventually lead to his death," explained Sulayman, who recalled that he would argue with his brother for months before his brother eventually left the house to live with other Salafi-Jihadis. Sulayman's brother left because he was tired of arguing with Sulayman. But he also started to worry that other AST members would hear about Sulayman's opposition to Salafi-Jihadism and harm him for it (Sulayman, June 12, 2019). For Sulayman's brother, his AST brothers became his newly adopted family.

Even though the simple rituals and activities of Salafi-Jihadis were designed to fill a recruit's day, the activities themselves were also often very meaningful. As Habib Sayah explained, "the participants, most of them for the first time, had the opportunity to engage in collective positive action...the key to AST's success was engaging its target population in positive collective efficacy and in actually addressing the population's revolutionary grievances when no one else [in Douar Hicher] was doing that" (Sayah, June 8, 2019).

AST's social services campaign is a clear example of an activity whose chief benefit was intra-group cohesion. It did not replace the Tunisian government's services, as some have argued (Petré, 2015). In fact, it is unclear how much these services – later given the slogan “Your Sons are at Your Service” – actually provided. Virtually no residents I interviewed in Douar Hicher recalled actually seeing or benefitting from any of this charity work. Zelin, who collected all activities AST promoted on its various websites and Facebook pages, found that AST promoted less than 25 activities in the Douar Hicher area that could be construed as community work in all of 2012 and 2013, the two years when the group's activity was at its highest (Zelin, 2020; Aaron Zelin, August 2, 2019).

AST social services likely helped some people, but their impact on the community was minor. Instead, the effect was more pronounced in the memory of former members. Mostafa remembered giving food aid to poor residents in his neighbourhood during Ramadan in 2011: “It was a special thing and unusual when we saw the joy in the people” he explained, “and the amount of energy we got from that was great” (Mostafa, June 19, 2019). The purpose of these charity activities was more of an attempt to bring members of the group closer together by giving them a chance to do work that felt meaningful rather than as an effort to replace the state.

The net result of all the time that the group spent together, the codes and rituals its members needed to learn, and the ideology they began to acquire, was to reinforce a sense of self-categorization as an ‘in-group’ based on social identity theory (Berger, 2018). This ‘in-group’ was formed of strong ties between like-minded members and

created norms of reciprocity, filters which distorted news and information with a Manichean dualism that led members to follow the group even when its leaders believed its success was predicated on violent resistance against Tunisian society or by fighting abroad (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).

Members were also motivated by the benefits that the group provided – both material and non-material – which created an environment where members competed over who could best demonstrate their commitment to AST and their added value as a group member. Some of the most basic commitment signals were among the ones described earlier (i.e., dressing and talking in the Salafi way, studying religious texts, becoming a regular participant in group activities). But there were myriad other ways: members gained prestige if they forced their family to adopt Salafi practices. For example, members would pressure adult women in their family not to go out in public without a male guardian and they would try to marry sisters or female cousins to brothers in AST. Members were also encouraged to recruit, or help recruit, male relatives and friends, and this was a big reason why the group spread so quickly in Douar Hicher (Chaima, June 11, 2019; Fatima, February 20, 2019).

Members were also encouraged to protect each other; norms of reciprocity which reflected the precarious life in Douar Hicher. These community norms protected members of the group, but also played a critical role in shaping members' experiences as Salafi-Jihadis in Douar Hicher. One night in late October 2012, a gang of Salafi-Jihadis confronted a group of people who were drinking and smoking hashish (Hajbi, 2017). The Salafi-Jihadis tried to force the group to quit smoking and drinking, resulting

in the outbreak of a fight between the two groups. After a short while, Tunisia's National Guard intervened in the fight, but only targeted the Salafi-Jihadis and let the others get away.

Salafi-Jihadis believed the intervention prevented them from policing the neighbourhood against criminal behaviour. The next night, they planned to attack the national guard with "white" weapons (knives). The Salafi-Jihadis marched on a national guard post in the Khalid Ibn al-Walid neighbourhood of Douar Hicher, and, using Molotov cocktails, forced the national guard to flee the building and confront the Salafi-Jihadis. By the end of the night, the raid had burned down the outpost (Mostafa, June 19, 2019; Zain, February 18, 2019).

The commander of the national guard in Douar Hicher was wounded during the fighting, so the national guard sent reinforcements the next night to attack the Salafi-Jihadis at the al-Nour mosque, one of their main meeting points in Douar Hicher. The National Guard claimed their attack on Salafi-Jihadis was a security operation in which they searched for – and found – weapons being hidden in the basement of the mosque. But a friend of the imam of the mosque argued that the operation was planned as an attack from the beginning, since the operation resulted in the imam's killing and the shooting of the muezzin, or person who announces the call to prayer. That the muezzin was shot in the back appears as evidence in their minds that the government raid was intended to assassinate local AST-supporting religious leaders (al-Hajj Salem, 2014).

Regardless of the exact outcome of events, the conflagration at the al-Nour mosque in October 2012 showed how norms of reciprocal obligation among members

in AST required them to protect each other, even if it could escalate to the committed acts of violence against the state and even if members did not initially intend to commit such violence when they first joined. As a result, it was an important example of how rapidly escalating events hardened the identity of members as Salafi-Jihadis through reciprocal obligation towards more extreme action. Over time, the norms of reciprocity that were essential to the precarious life in Douar Hicher – where one was expected to support a friend who was suffering on the understanding that they would do the same for you – ended up applying for AST membership. AST members grew more supportive of each other as their situation grew difficult. In hubs, this meant preserving friendships even in the face of government prosecution. These effects, combined with Salafi-Jihadi clashes with state security services “further activated and deepened” their identity (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007, p. 186) as Salafi-Jihadis and AST members, to the point that disavowing their beliefs became riskier than continuing to espouse them.

The notions of reciprocity, the use of violence, and the importance of in-group identities were not new in Douar Hicher. But Salafi-Jihadism gave these social structures an ideology, a political agenda, a broader social network, more incentives to join, and desirable rewards for membership than previous groups. As one young Salafi-Jihadi explained of the tension between the old gangs of Douar Hicher and his new religious project: “The problem for those who have converted to good Islamism [Salafism]” he explained, “is that they continue to be affected by the vulgarity and baseness of their old life. When they have the opportunity to defend Islam, they don’t realize what they are doing, resort to violence and cause problems” (ICG, 2013, p. 6). As a result, the raid

was also indicative of the growing tension and division between the government and the Salafi-Jihadi movement. By the end of 2012, this violence and intimidation, although local, started to become not only a greater threat to stability in Tunisia, but a larger part of what it meant to be a member of AST.

7.3 Becoming a Foreign Fighter

AST created the environment in places like Douar Hicher where individuals considered joining ISIS in Syria, but this did not happen overnight. The evolution required organizational shifts within AST that transformed the group from a political organization to a protest movement (7.3.1), and, finally, to an insurgency (7.3.2). These organizational shifts were not inevitable, but a product of several decisions made by a small number of people at key moments, subsequently changed the trajectory of AST members in Douar Hicher from being part of a social movement to participating in clandestine insurgent group. This section is about when the Tunisian government formally designated AST a terrorist organization. Those shifts culminated in August 2013, when many AST members in Douar Hicher decided to flee to Syria to avoid being imprisoned at home (7.3.3). Although their choice of joining ISIS was mediated by the preferences of hard-line AST leadership who supported ISIS, when the time came to leave for Syria, members did not see ISIS as an extreme organization, but rather a natural extension of their beliefs and efforts developing an Islamic state in Tunisia (7.3.4).

7.3.1 Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia as a Protest Campaign

In theory, Salafi-Jihadism opposes any state not governed by its literalist interpretation of Islamic laws (Maher, 2016). But in practice, many members of AST at first supported Tunisia's democratic transition, including those from Douar Hicher. Many AST members also supported Ennahda, a large and well-organized religious conservative political party that had itself been an opposition political movement during the 1980s and 1990s. At points, Ennahda threatened to use politically motivated violence (Wolf, 2017). But by 2011, Ennahda emerged from decades of opposition to lead Tunisia's post-revolutionary government. Nevertheless, the party was not homogenous: there were several leaders in Ennahda who espoused ideological positions about the role of religion in political life that were similar to Salafi-Jihadism (Wolf, 2017). This included Tunisia's first democratically elected Prime Minister, Hamadi Jebali, who declared in a speech that Ennahda's victory in the country's October 2011 national elections would usher in a "righteous Caliphate" (Mitchell, 2011). Other leading Ennahda figures, such as Sadok Chorou and Habib Ellouze, supported AST and spoke at group events (Zouaghi and Cavatorta, 2018).

Chourou, Ellouze, and others in Ennahda's most conservative faction pushed the party to insist that Islamic law be included as part of Tunisia's constitution, a key addendum that would please AST adherents and sympathizers. However, in March 2012, they lost an intraparty vote to others who preferred compromise with the secular political parties and business elites in Tunisia. After that vote, on March 26, 2012, Ennahda formally announced that it would no longer insist that Tunisia's new constitution cite Islamic law as a source of legislation. Instead, they would focus on more

moderate goals for the role of Islam in Tunisian political life, including pressing successfully to designate Islam as Tunisia's official religion and Arabic as the state's language (Wolf, 2017).

Ennahda's decision to abandon efforts to include Islamic law in Tunisia's constitution was a turning point for AST that will be described in more detail in Section 7.4.2. However, once it was clear that Ennahda would not insist that Tunisia be governed by Islamic law, AST regarded the group as supporting man-made laws and therefore a legitimate target of resistance. After March 2012, AST changed into a protest campaign whose goals were to oppose Tunisia's entire political system and replace it with an Islamic one. The shift in attitudes about Tunisia's political transition and popular disappointment with Ennahda in Douar Hicher was evident between Tunisia's first national election in October 2011 and its next nationwide parliamentary election in 2014.

Table 7.1 Election results in Douar Hicher, Kabaria, Greater Tunis, and Tunisia

	Douar Hicher	Kabaria	Greater Tunis	Tunisia
2011 Turnout	80%	87%	85%	76%
2011 Ennahda Vote	46%	48%	38%	37%
2014 Turnout	59%	75%	75%	70%
2014 Ennahda Vote	31%	33%	26%	28%
Subtotal: Difference 2011–2014 Turnout	-21%	-12%	-10%	-7%
Subtotal: Difference 2011–2014 Ennahda Vote	-15%	-15%	-12%	-9%
Total: Difference Turnout + Ennahda Vote	-36%	-27%	-22%	-16%

Source: Tunisian Open Data Initiative (<https://github.com/OpenGovTN>); Compiled by author.

As Table 7.1 shows, in 2011, when AST was still a nascent organization but nonetheless encouraged members to participate in politics, Douar Hicher had a larger

turnout (80 percent) than the nationwide average (76 percent). Residents also supported Ennahda at rates far greater than Tunisia as a whole and even within the four governorates of Greater Tunis. By the next nationwide election, Tunisia's 2014 parliamentary elections, AST had been active for years and by then had encouraged members and supporters to turn away from politics. In 2014, Douar Hicher had a 21 percent decline in turnout and a 15 percent decline in support for Ennahda, both larger than the averages in Tunisia as a whole and within Greater Tunis specifically. That voters in Douar Hicher had among the largest declines in both turnout and vote share for Ennahda highlighted the extent of the disillusion in Douar Hicher, and among many in AST, with Ennahda as a political party and the political process in general. Notably, the decline in vote share for Ennahda remained largely the same between Kabaria and Douar Hicher – people were disillusioned with the political party in both neighbourhoods. The difference between the neighbourhoods was far greater for turnout, evidence that AST had a powerful effect turning off supporters to the political process overall, not just for Ennahda specifically.

Perhaps the largest and most consequential demonstration during AST's brief interlude as a protest organization took place in front of U.S. Embassy Tunis on September 14, 2012 (Sayah, 2012). Thousands of AST members gathered in the al-Fath mosque in downtown Tunis. They marched across the city, shutting down traffic on one of Tunis' largest highways until they reached the US Embassy roughly 10 kilometres away. There, demonstrations inciting violence over the publication of a video in the United States that defamed the Prophet Mohammed lasted over an hour and

resulted in the burning down of a school where many American diplomats sent their children (Amara, 2012).

Following that protest, the Tunisian government faced greater public and international pressure to confront AST's activities nationwide. The state began restricting AST's movement and tried to arrest AST's leader, Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, who fled from the fallout of the September 2012 protest to al-Fath mosque. Abu lyadh was protected in front of al-Fath from the police raid by a wall of hundreds of supporters. He escaped the arrest attempt, but had to flee Tunisia, smuggling himself into Libya, where he remained until he was killed sometime before 2020 (Greenberg, 2015; Hamming, 2019).

7.3.2 Ansar Sharia Tunisia as an Underground Military Organization

The September 2012 protest at the US Embassy in Tunis, and raids in Douar Hicher in late 2012, increased tension between the state and Salafi-Jihadis in Douar Hicher. By the start of 2013, these tensions, and the departure of Abu lyadh, exposed a rift within AST's leadership. Some, mostly young members – and many in Douar Hicher in particular – argued that the group should fight back against police raids and arrests of other members. Others, particularly older members who had fought with AQ, argued that AST should not respond to arrests and raids with violence, because fighting back would only lead to more attention on the group's activities, and that they were not yet ready for armed resistance (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019).

AST members had reason to be concerned about their legal standing by the start of 2013. By January 2013, while he was Minister of Interior, Ali La'arayedh, directed his security services to consider AST a *de facto* terrorist group. La'arayedh did not yet want to declare AST a terrorist organization at the time because he wanted to gather more intelligence on the group to understand the scope of their organization and capability without taking an action that would provoke the group to be more secretive or violent. "We didn't want to make the declaration prematurely," he said, because doing so might spark a conflict that the security services were not yet prepared for (Ali La'arayedh, July 3, 2019).

By considering AST as a terrorist group for all intents and purposes, Tunisia's Ministry of Interior increased its surveillance, detention, and intelligence collection on AST members in Douar Hicher. In Douar Hicher, Salafi-Jihadis felt the tension and started extorting residents to help them avoid arrest and detention by state security (Imad, July 3, 2019). They also no longer planned activities in the mosques, fearing there may be spies among the worshippers. Instead, they met in the private homes of supporters in the community late at night. By 2013, secrecy had become paramount (Moez, July 3, 2019).

The turning point that marked the shift of AST from a protest movement into an insurgency occurred on the morning of February 6, 2013, when opposition politician Choukri Belaid was shot four times in the neck and head on his way to work. Belaid, a leftist who was deeply critical of religious parties in Tunisia, faced death threats from Salafi-Jihadists for months yet was unprotected when he was killed (Ryan, 2013).

It was unclear whether AST leadership supported this assassination. With Abu lyadh, the leader of AST, in Libya, there was a power struggle among his deputies over who would control AST in Tunisia. Some well-informed observers believed that a hard-line faction of AST deputies, led by several pro-ISIS lieutenants like Boubaker el Hakim and Abu Ayub al-Tunisi, planned Belaid's assassination in order to initiate a conflict with the Tunisian state (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019; Ali La'arayedh, July 3, 2019; Zelin, 2020). In any event, Belaid's death sparked a large protest in the centre of Tunis, with demonstrators demanding more robust security institutions to combat such threats. These protests eventually forced the resignation of the prime minister and almost toppled the government. To respond to the public outcry, Ennahda's executive council promoted Ali La'arayedh from interior minister to Prime Minister of Tunisia (Wolf, 2017).

La'arayedh's elevation to the premiership fulfilled the desire of AST's hardliners for a clash with the Tunisian state. La'arayedh was himself a vocal proponent of a more robust crackdown on Salafi-Jihadism, and his appointment signified a shift in Tunisia's approach to AST. Under La'arayedh's premiership, the Tunisian government would no longer consider AST a political organization that could be moderated by the political process, but rather a security threat that necessitated a response with force.

Even after Belaid's assassination, and despite rising tensions with the government and its increasingly competent security services, still relatively few Tunisians had gone to fight in Syria. Estimates in May 2013 suggested between 230 and 800 Tunisians had left the country to fight in Syria (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013), far fewer than the 2,900 to 7,000 Tunisians who would reach Syria by 2015 (Zelin, 2018; Soufan,

2015). From Libya, AST leader Abu lyadh advised Tunisians whilst in exile not to fight abroad but to stay in Tunisia and carry out “peaceful jihad” (BBC Monitoring, 2013). Although Abu lyadh may have been making these statements for public benefit, it does not appear that he controlled the entire AST supporter network at that time, regardless of whether the comments reflected his true beliefs (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019).

Despite increased attention on AST, La’arayedh’s new government could not prevent a second assassination of a politician who had antagonized Islamists and faced death threats. Gunmen on a motorbike sprayed member of parliament Mohammed Brahmi with bullets in Tunis on July 25, 2013 (BBC News, 2013a). That night, La’arayedh gave a televised address connecting the murder of Brahmi with the ongoing tensions in Egypt. Ennahda leadership were preoccupied with the military coup that overthrew Mohammed Morsi, the post-revolutionary elected president of Egypt who Ennahda saw as being a political ally. “This [assassination] is aimed at pushing us into the unknown, whether it is chaos, fighting, civil war, or the return of tyranny,” he said (BBC, 2013a). However, those following AST activities at the time noted it was more likely that Sidi Bouzid was a stronghold of the group and they wanted to spark more government reprisals specifically there. Government reprisals against AST would help bolster the group’s chances of fully transforming into a domestic insurgency, a cause many hard-line members in AST supported (Sayah, June 8, 2019).

Several weeks later, without informing the rest of the executive council of Ennahda, La’arayedh declared AST a terrorist organization on August 12, 2013 (BBC News, 2013b). His appearance on television to declare AST a terrorist organization “was

the first time I had heard of [the declaration],” explained Oussama Sghaier, an Ennahda MP in the executive council (Oussama Sghaier, June 11, 2019).

7.3.3 Douar Hicher’s Salafi-Jihadis as Newly Designated Terrorists

When AST was declared a terrorist organization by the government of Tunisia, it criminalized the activities of hundreds of young men in Douar Hicher virtually overnight. After that declaration, “they would arrest you even on the suspicion that [you] were involved with AST,” explains Wassim, a member of AST at the time. Many, like Wassim, tried to flee Tunisia out of fear of being arrested (Wassim, June 30, 2019). But most did not have the resources to leave Tunisia overnight – they needed to rely on AST to help them leave, and AST would use its resources to facilitate their travel to Libya en route to Syria (Mustafa, February 18, 2019).

Because many AST supporters in Douar Hicher were ex-convicts, the declaration of AST as a terrorist organization meant they faced the prospect of returning to Tunisia’s prison system. For them, therefore, leaving the country to join ISIS in Syria was a way to avoid prison. Paradoxically, when state security finally started to police its Salafi-Jihadi problem, it resulted in hundreds of people organizing ways to go to Syria, including in Douar Hicher (Mostafa, February 18, 2019 and June 19, 2019).

It may seem irrational in retrospect to believe that so many people would prefer joining ISIS in Syria to prison in Tunisia, but it was a choice many AST members made. The Tunisian prison system was a scarring experience under the previous dictatorship, but the use of torture and other abuses was still a problem in 2014, according to

interviews with an organization that lobbies Tunisia's government on prison reform (Zeina and Salwa, June 27, 2019). This was particularly true for those arrested on terrorism charges: "it is noticeable that they are treated more harshly in order to achieve security purposes," explained Salwa, the head of the organization (June 27, 2019). "When I ask [prison wardens] about torture [in their prisons], they say there is no organized torture in the prison. But it does occur because of the lack of experience of the prison guards and the over capacity of prisons in Tunisia. There is one person responsible for 60-70 people ... imagine having your own kid making you crazy, never mind 60-70 people" (Salwa, June 27, 2019).

One example of an ex-convict who joined ISIS in Syria rather than face imprisonment in Tunisia was Marwan Douiri, a well-known rapper in Tunisia. Nicknamed "Emino," he was arrested in 2012 for possession of marijuana and sentenced to two years in prison (Sulayman, June 12, 2019). When Emino was released after eight months in 2013, he contributed to "Police are Dogs," one of the most popular rap songs released in Tunisia after the revolution (Green, 2015). The video, which included rappers taunting police in front of the Ministry of Interior headquarters in downtown Tunis, caused an immediate controversy (Weld el 15, 2014) Police tried to arrest all involved in the making of the video, including Emino.

Even though the case against the artists involved in making the video was eventually dismissed, law enforcement's pursuit of Emino during that time changed his life. To avoid arrest, he hid from police in a safe house in Douar Hicher run by Salafi-Jihadis he met in prison. In the months he spent with these Salafi-Jihadis, Emino began

to be convinced by their beliefs and practices (Sulayman, June 12, 2019). In 2013, Emينو's rap started including more commentary about religion and geopolitics. In one of his last popular hits, "Oh God, be Loyal," released in October 2013, he sings about how desolate life is in Tunisia and the Muslim world in general (Emينو, 2013).

By 2014, Emينو stopped producing rap and prepared to go to Syria (Sulayman, June 12, 2019). In order to escape yet another prison sentence, this time not for a rap video but for his newly adopted Salafi-Jihadi beliefs, Emينو smuggled himself into Syria and announced he had joined ISIS via Facebook on March 17, 2015 (Emينو, 2015). While in Syria and Iraq, Emينو would become a popular media figure in ISIS and would produce propaganda material in which he would call on young Tunisians from the Hūma to travel to ISIS (Irfaa Sawtak, 2015). Emينو died in Mosul, Iraq in 2016 (Ajroudi, 2017), but his story highlights two themes: first, the importance of protection as a benefit to joining AST in Douar Hicher, and second, the willingness of AST members to forgo time in a Tunisian prison in favour of, eventually, joining ISIS in Syria.

The state crackdown on AST decreased overall support for AST but hardened those who remained in the group towards violence. Although it occurred nationwide, this effect was more pronounced in recruitment hubs because it brought remaining members together and strengthened their commitment to AST via norms of reciprocal obligation. They followed hard-line AST leaders who encouraged a more violent approach, including travelling to Syria. Bilal Chaouachi, for example, was an AST member who publicly encouraged people to fight in Syria (Bouazza and Schemm, 2012). In 2012, Chaouachi, trained at a prestigious religious school in Tunis, was

arrested for his involvement in the violent demonstration in front of U.S. Embassy Tunis on 12 September 2012 (Kapitalis, 2012). Once he was released from prison, Chaouachi continued to publicly advocate for Tunisians to fight in Syria (Zelin, 2018) until he was arrested in November 2013 for preaching in mosques without prior permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (al-Masdar, 2013). Chaouachi is another example, like Emino, of someone fleeing Tunisian prison for Syria: he left a suspended three-month prison sentence in Tunisia in January 2014 and AST media outlets confirmed he had arrived in Syria: "Praise be to God," Chaouachi wrote in a published message, "Today I entered the land of shām [Syria] and I am fine...It is better than my hometown, clearly better than my job, better than my country, and even better than money" (Radio-Mahdia, 2014). While in Syria, Chaouachi would be a sharia official who would urge other Tunisians to join ISIS after the group captured Mosul (Zelin, 2018).

7.3.4 How did they Reach Syria, and Why did they Choose ISIS?

Increased state crackdown on AST might explain why some Tunisian Salafi-Jihadists wanted to flee to Syria. But they had been leaving Tunisia to fight in Syria for a more than a year before August 2013: AST official propaganda promoted its leader Abu lyadh, stating that "Tunisians can be found everywhere in the land of jihad. The ways of going are easy and we don't stop our people from leaving" (Zelin, 2018).

So what explains why they chose ISIS? We assume that people had a choice about which group they would join if they decided to fight in Syria's civil war. But for those from Douar Hicher who lacked the means to reach Syria on their own, AST's

material resources and human networks mediated their decision-making. For everyone I interviewed in Douar Hicher who had relatives go to Syria, or who themselves were stopped trying to get to Syria, relying on AST to leave Tunisia and fight in Syria essentially meant joining ISIS. This was not the end state that these recruits had in mind when they joined, but a process of their increasingly self-identifying with AST and hardening of their beliefs towards violence. Combined with the support of AST leadership for ISIS by the end of 2013, ISIS became a logical extension of many who were first AST members.

The most important reason why Douar Hicher's Salafi-Jihadis joined ISIS, as opposed to any other group in Syria, was because AST leaders supported this group's efforts in Syria above others. When ISIS first emerged in March 2013, AST was divided: young hardliners supported ISIS, while older AST members who advocated for gradual political change tended to support Al Qaeda. The older generation was in charge of AST when Abu lyadh was in Tunisia, but when he fled to Libya, it created an opening for the younger hardliners to move in. The logic of the power grab of these hardliners who supported ISIS (see Section 7.4.1) was that instigating violence would invite a state crackdown that would fulfil their plans for more immediate, widespread conflict. Once the Tunisian government started raiding AST meeting places and forced Abu lyadh to flee to Libya, hardliners like Abu Ayub al-Tunisi, Boubaker el Hakim and Kamal Zarrouk became *de facto* AST leaders (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019). These AST lieutenants supported ISIS over AQ because they had fought with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq and were influenced by his approach, which presaged ISIS (Zelin, 2020). Meanwhile, older AST officials who supported Al Qaeda, such as Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, the former

leader who had run a guest house for Tunisians in Afghanistan and co-founded a network of Tunisian Salafi-Jihadists connected to Al Qaeda (*ibid*), were marginalized.

As AST transformed into a militant group, leaders started to prioritize the loyalty of their followers rather than the size of their following – the group narrowed but also grew more committed to violence. This accelerated the hardening of in-group beliefs. “Kamal Zarrouk was constantly asking who could be trusted,” Mustafa explained. Mustafa was at the heart of these debates in 2013: his brother and father had already left for ISIS in Syria, and he wanted to join them. “He [Zarrouk] was constantly reminding us how people like Bin Laden were killed because those he trusted gave him away,” Mostafa said (Mostafa, June 19, 2019). As the group became more secretive in response to state pressure, AST’s new leaders were no longer recruiting but looking to select and promote only members who they believed were committed and trustworthy.

It was not easy to travel to Syria from Tunisia. Few Salafi-Jihadis by 2013 could simply buy a plane ticket and travel abroad. In Douar Hicher, most members lacked the financial resources and wherewithal to plan international travel on their own – many had hardly left Greater Tunis, never mind travelled outside the country. Few held passports (Mostafa, February 18, 2019). In addition, by 2013, state surveillance of Salafi-Jihadis made it difficult to reach Syria as a single young man from Douar Hicher. For example, by 2013 the Tunisian government required young men under the age of 35 traveling alone to submit a letter from either their father or their employer stating that they were allowed to travel when flying out of Tunisia’s airports (Zain, February 20, 2013). At first, this was effective, because parents and employers rarely supported or were even aware

that their child or employee was planning to leave for Syria (Alma, June 13, 2019). In addition, Tunisian authorities started to develop files on AST members, which made it difficult for them to leave the country legally. Turkey allowed Tunisians visa-free travel since Tunisia's independence in 1956, so these restrictions were placed on Salafi-Jihadis at the airport in Tunis (Ali La'arayedh, July 3, 2019).

Overcoming these material, logistical, and legal hurdles required more resources than Salafi-Jihadis could muster on their own. That is why many foreign fighters from Douar Hicher travelled to Syria with AST facilitation. To describe the complex process by which fighters reached Syria, I focus on the story of Mostafa, a resident of Douar Hicher who was detained trying to reach Syria twice. I interviewed others about stories of friends or family who reached Syria. While the details of each story are different, three constants emerged that are present in Mostafa's story: 1) their travels were too complex for them to undertake on their own; 2) they needed AST to help them get to Syria; and 3) once ISIS emerged, these fighters had little choice but to join ISIS if they wanted AST support to leave Tunisia. The details of this chapter were compiled from multiple sources (Mostafa, June 19, 2019; Mohammed Iqbel Ben Rejeb, June 13, 2019; Mohsen, June 22, 2019; Imad, July 3, 2019; Moez, July 3, 2019; Sulayman, June 10, 2019; and Mohsen, June 22, 2019).

To be sent abroad as a foreign fighter required earning the trust of the now-insurgent, hard-line-dominated AST by demonstrating commitment and loyalty. Personal references from other, established AST members were key. Prospective recruits competed for the honour of being picked to go abroad like a job promotion.

Was the recruit attending prayers every day, five times a day? Were they contributing to the cause by taking on a job or helping organize an activity? Had they learned Salafi-Jihadi beliefs and practices? Could they be trusted?

By late 2013, Mostafa could only meet his friends in AST in secret because AST had fallen under intense scrutiny from Tunisia's security services. When Tunisia's government declared AST a terrorist organization, it criminalized a movement that included Mostafa, his father, brother, and thirty of his close friends (Mostafa, February 18, 2019). Mostafa's father and brother had already joined ISIS, and his brother had cut off communication with him to pressure Mostafa to join him in Syria. In order to join his family and escape arrest, Mostafa was planning to leave for Syria himself.

But Mostafa needed AST's support to travel to Syria. He could not simply buy a plane ticket to Turkey or show up at the border with Libya and expect a smuggler to take him to the nearest Salafi-Jihadi camp. He needed references, logistical support, money, and information about where to go. He therefore had to work his way through AST's ranks by demonstrating his commitment to their cause. This recruitment started in the local mosques, but even after frequenting the mosque looking for information on how to get to Syria, it was not easy to join AST or to be selected by the group as someone it would support to travel to Syria. By 2013, AST's "main concern was that someone would infiltrate the movement," explained Mostafa (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

Like any underground organization, AST developed layers of secrecy. "When they accept you" inside the first layer, Mostafa explained, "they say Islam isn't just about

prayers. You are given books to read.” This curriculum, designed by a well-trained and highly respected Tunisian Salafi-Jihadi ideologue named Khatib al-Idrisi, was intended to ensure a recruit had the right doctrinal knowledge and practices. Khatib al-Idrisi is one of the most respected ideologues in Salafi-Jihadi circles. He studied under Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia before returning to Tunisia in 1994 (Zelin, 2013). And for many recruits like Mostafa, they found that when they read those books, they were “convinced that this is the right path” (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

By learning the AST curriculum – such as memorizing certain verses in the Qur’an and demonstrating mastery of key concepts in Salafi-Jihadism – a recruit demonstrated that he had the appropriate beliefs. By changing one’s appearance and the behaviour of those around him, a recruit demonstrated that he carried out the proper practices. Salafi-Jihadism has developed extensive literature on the beliefs and practices that are appropriate for adherents. For more detail on these beliefs and practices, please see Aymenn al-Tamimi’s translation of original ISIS documents (2015). These were among the signals necessary for a recruit to show they were committed: if one had acted properly and knew Salafi-Jihadi doctrine, this behaviour showed the group that a recruit was devoted to the cause and trustworthy.

By the end of 2013, these commitment tests were institutionalized within the organization as an important threshold recruits had to cross to garner AST’s help traveling to Syria. The last step in that process was to raise the money to pay for one’s trip. Mostafa had to raise 2,000 Tunisian dinars (£532) for his trip. In poor neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher, that sum could represent half-a-years’ salary (Zain,

February 18, 2019). “Not everyone could get the money,” Mostafa explained, “People cried because they couldn’t get it.” AST was well funded, but usually the group would require each member to raise the money on their own as a final test. To make things easier, a fatwa the group released sanctioned theft from “infidels” if the purpose of the theft was to pay for the trip to fight jihad in Syria. “Many people stole the money” to get to Syria, Mostafa said (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

Once Mostafa raised the money, it was divided into three parts. The first 500 dinars (£133) was folded inside his passport, which AST helped him acquire, and handed to an AST recruiter. Once they had collected about 20 passports, an AST recruiter would bring these passports to a contact at the Tunisian Ministry of Interior. This contact would take the money and stamp an exit visa inside each passport. There was a separate effort to help people from this neighbourhood apply for passports; most did not have one before the country’s 2010-11 revolution (Zain, February 18, 2019). AST would return them to Mostafa and other AST members preparing to leave for Syria. The purpose of the exit visa was to allow Mostafa to return to Tunisia some day and it would not seem as though he left illegally (Mostafa, February 18, 2019).

Once Mostafa got his passport back with the illegal exit stamp, he would travel to Ben Guerdane, a Tunisian town on the Libyan border. This was a typical pattern for many recruits, because by late 2013 it was too risky to try to travel through the Tunis airport. There, Mustafa would use a portion of the remaining 1500 dinars (£399) to buy a hotel room for the night. The rest he would pay to a smuggler, who would help him cross the border illegally into Libya. Once in Libya, the smuggler would drive a group of

aspiring foreign fighters 17 hours across the country to ISIS training camps in Derna. Derna was a hub of recruitment for Libyan ISIS fighters near the Libyan-Egyptian border and a crucial waypoint for Mustafa and others in Tunisia to reach Syria (Rosenblatt, 2016). After recruits arrived in Derna, they would receive several months of training before boarding a flight to Turkey. After getting to Turkey, it was easy to reach the border and enter ISIS-controlled Syria.

Not all Tunisians followed this route to Derna – others interviewed described going to training camps in Libya closer to the Tunisian border, such as Sabratha or Zwara (Zelin, 2020; Wassim, June 30, 2019). Some became foreign fighters before AST's turn towards violence. In 2012, for example, visa-free travel for Tunisians to Turkey meant some early joiners flew to Turkey from Tunisia and travelled freely to the Syrian border. However, after 2013, more and more Tunisians wanting to join ISIS had to smuggle themselves into Libya before they could reach Turkey. AST also helped develop "cover stories" for members to justify their travel to Turkey (Sulayman, June 12, 2019; Wassim June 30, 2019; Ali La'arayedh, July 3, 2019; Balboni and Malka, 2016).

The travel to the Syrian border was more straightforward once fighters arrived in Turkey. And, once fighters entered ISIS-controlled Syria, they were processed in a way that appeared to check their credentials. These were the registration forms that formed the basis for the analysis in Chapter Four. These forms also listed who recruited them and who, if anyone, had helped facilitate their travel. There were only a few names of facilitators listed on the entry forms I have analysed, suggesting that those few names

would be recognizable to ISIS in Syria and therefore serve as a final gesture of verification for travelling foreign fighters.

Mostafa's story of trying to reach Syria was not the only pathway for aspiring foreign fighters from Tunisia trying to get to Syria. Regardless of the exact geographic pathway, most of them, like Mostafa, needed AST's help. And that help came with conditions that steered the fighters toward ISIS. For example, another way that these aspiring foreign fighters would use connections to AST to get to Syria was through a maze of commercial fronts. AST used businesses, like clothing or mobile phone stores and other small shops, as fronts to show that their members had legitimate reasons to travel abroad. Salafi-Jihadis who posed as businessmen helped convince the Tunisian authorities that they could afford to pay for a ticket to Turkey, often a popular destination anyway for Tunisian holiday-goers, and had a reason to return. When questioned by authorities, these men seemed like legitimate business owners on a personal vacation. But the businesses made no actual profit – they were used to recycle money raised mainly from donations to make AST members seem more legitimate. This veneer of respectability gave many members another route to reach Syria despite increased government surveillance (Sulayman, June 12, 2019).

The common theme in most of the stories of how Tunisian foreign fighters got to Syria was AST assistance. With that assistance came AST control over their ultimate destination. Mostafa's story demonstrates that even the process of signing up to go to Syria was mediated by others because it was more complicated than we at first might assume. The final step in a prospective foreign fighters' journey from Douar Hicher to

Syria was facilitated by a group whose leaders saw themselves as recruiters for ISIS. Because many prospective foreign fighters from Douar Hicher lacked the resources to travel on their own, they relied on AST networks to help them organize their training and travel. As AST leaders shifted their political support to ISIS, these preferences were passed down onto the fighters themselves to the point where their desire to fight in Syria was indistinguishable from their desire to fight for ISIS.

7.3.5 Preliminary Conclusions

So far, this chapter described how residents of the Salafi-Jihadi hub of Douar Hicher were initially drawn to AST when it was a political movement; how AST indoctrinated its recruits with Salafi-Jihadi beliefs; and how AST members eventually adopted more violent tactics. This chapter then described how AST changed as an organization due to pivotal events in the years following Tunisia's revolution. From these dual evolutions – that of the organization and its members – this chapter highlights how much the transformation of a recruitment hub specifically for foreign fighting relies on situational factors.

As this dissertation has shown, members could join AST for relatively innocuous reasons. However, the evolution of the group from a social movement to an eventual insurgency hardened individual beliefs towards the use of violence as it strengthened their in-group identity. So far, this chapter focused on these dual shifts: how AST changed, and how the individual members of AST changed as well. Recruits who eventually decided to join ISIS in Syria were acting based on beliefs they had adopted

gradually. Their process of identifying progressively more closely as part of AST made members choose to remain in the group even though they were not prepared to fight the Tunisian government when it declared that they were terrorists. Thus, to leave and fight abroad in an established insurgency seemed like a safer alternative than the risk of fighting a war that people were not prepared for at home. Given members' beliefs and activities in Tunisia, and the connections of AST leaders in Syria, ISIS was the logical, even safe choice for those who desired to remain in the group.

Members identified more closely with AST over time and supported each other as the state started restricting their activities and arresting, or even killing, group members. By the time Tunisia designated AST a terrorist organisation, members needed AST on a practical level to leave Tunisia and reach Syria. Through those twin factors - the Tunisian government crackdown and the chance to leave the country facilitated by a trusted in-group - made the surge of Tunisian foreign fighters to ISIS in Syria possible.

7.4 Contingency and Tunisia's Foreign Fighters

An estimated 3,000 Tunisians joined ISIS, proportionally one of the highest rates of foreign fighters who joined ISIS of any country in the world. Further, an estimated 27,000 Tunisians were detained trying to reach Syria (Zelin, 2018). Tunisia had a preponderance of hubs. These hubs were large - eight of the world's 20 largest ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs were in Tunisia - and geographically dispersed - as opposed concentrated in specific regions, like most countries (Rosenblatt, 2016). The conventional approach to research on ISIS recruitment might be to work backwards

from their status as ISIS fighters and explain their reasons, methods, or motivations for joining. However, as Kurzman argues, this method of explanation often leaves an unsatisfactory “residual of evidence that just doesn’t fit” (Kurzman, 2004, p. 5). Instead of working backwards from the fact that individuals were ISIS foreign fighters, this dissertation works forwards from the moment they chose to join a movement that would eventually lead them to believe that joining ISIS as a foreign fighter was the logical extension of their own beliefs.

Doing so, we find that the mass mobilization of Tunisians to ISIS was not pre-ordained, but rather the product of situational factors resulting from certain choices made by key individuals at four critical moments after Tunisia’s revolution. The revolution was itself a key moment that, as previously discussed, created the necessary but insufficient condition for a hub to form. This section will focus on how certain choices were made during these four moments of contingency, with “multiple futures coexisting synchronically” (Ermakoff, 2015, p. 110), that ultimately led to hundreds of young men and women in neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher to join ISIS in Syria. The focus of this section is on highlighting the importance of counterfactuals in the evolution of AST and its members; some facts may be repeated from previous sections of this chapter.

The four moments described in this section are: 1) the general amnesty for prisoners, including Salafi-Jihadis, after the revolution deposed Tunisia’s dictatorship in January 2011 (7.4.1); 2) Ennahda’s decision not to push for shari’a law as a basis for Tunisia’s post-revolution constitution (7.4.2); 3) the hard-line takeover of AST leadership and their efforts to assassinate political leaders (7.4.3); and 4) then-Prime Minister

La'arayedh's designation of AST as a terrorist organization (7.4.4). These occurred during what Ermakoff calls "moments of social and historical indeterminacy," where "habitual and institutional bearings lose their obviousness," and "actors can no longer take scripts and procedures for granted" (2015, p. 115). Had certain choices in those moments been made differently, Douar Hicher might have instead been a hub of support for a political party, a protest movement, or a domestic insurgency. By highlighting the indeterminate nature of foreign fighting, we can conclude that, while hubs may form and function similarly for a variety of high-risk organized activities, what those hubs form *for* (i.e., domestic insurgency, sustained protest, or foreign fighting) is contingent on situational factors and the choices made by a small number of individuals at key moments. These four contingent moments are summarized below.

7.4.1 Contingent Moment #1 – Prisoners Released from Tunisian Jails

Tunisians have been an important part of all major transnational jihadist conflicts starting with the war in Afghanistan in 1979 (Zelin, 2020). But starting in the mid-2000s, transnational jihadism gained a wider following in Tunisia as the state embraced more open practices of Islam, and satellite television allowed people to access religious messages beyond that which were preached in the state-sanctioned mosques (Wolf, 2017; Lynch, 2006). This combination of the softening of French-inspired, state-imposed secularism and new, popularly accessible alternative sources of religious learning drove greater public demand for free religious expression (Zeghal, 2013). These demands eventually resulted in state repression, particularly after the state disrupted a

small-scale Salafi-Jihadi insurgency in the mid-2000s (Zelin, 2020). At the time, state security feared that this insurgency formed because the government allowed too much religious freedom. By rounding up thousands of Salafi-Jihadi prisoners after allowing them to briefly organize, the state had made religious expression a popular form of political protest against an increasingly unpopular and repressive regime (Wolf, 2017).

This campaign of arrests after the brief opening of religious freedom pulled in veterans of transnational jihadist conflicts like Iraq or Afghanistan alongside anyone else who appeared deeply religious. This primed Salafi-Jihadism to rise after Tunisia's 2010-11 revolution. The arrests in the mid-2000s placed a small number of radical ideologues together in Tunisia's prisons with a much larger number of young men who were merely upset with the state over their perceived unlawful detention. A series of terrorist attacks in the 2000s prompted Tunisia to pass a draconian anti-terrorism law that gave the state wide-ranging powers to arrest anyone on suspicion of affiliations with religious terrorism. The state detained roughly 300 people who had fought with transnational jihadist groups during this time (Fahmi and Meddeb, 2015). But it also imprisoned thousands more, some of whom were merely arrested for attending morning prayer, under the unsubstantiated suspicion that their religious convictions would lead to militancy (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019). These thousands of prisoners may not otherwise have participated in Salafi-Jihadism, but in prison they were more easily recruited (Marwan, June 10, 2019).

On January 20, 2011, all political prisoners were released after the government issued a general amnesty. Most of those thousands of political prisoners were being

held unjustifiably, including at least one future Prime Minister of Tunisia. Yet within this group, the Tunisian government had released a well-organized network of Salafi-Jihadis, many of whom were able to pass messages to each other in prison (Greenberg, 2015). This general amnesty, combined with the lack of credible conservative religious alternatives for the Tunisian population, allowed Salafi-Jihadist networks unprecedented freedom to recruit supporters amid a transitional post-revolutionary state with weak security services and a population energized by the belief that political activism could foment change. Many of the individuals who had been arrested in the 2000s on terrorism charges would go on to form AST, the Al-Qaeda-inspired social movement with aspirations of shaping a more Islamic post-Ben Ali state in Tunisia (Zelin, 2019). These prison networks also coalesced around AST, which, at its height, may have drawn in as many as 100,000 followers (Aaron Zelin, August 2, 2019).

The January 2011 decision regarding a general amnesty was crucial for three reasons. First, it released many prisoners at once who returned home to their neighbourhoods. Sometimes, as in the case of Douar Hicher but not, as we saw, in Kabaria, these prisoners took advantage of the relative absence of state and local police forces to take control of their hometowns. Second, the decision resulted in the release of the cadre of leaders of AST who had connected in prison and would form a national social movement. Had the transitional government only released political prisoners, and not also those arrested on terrorism charges, it may not have faced AST at all. The Tunisian government, in the throes of a turbulent revolution and political transition, did not have the governance or security services capacity to properly monitor or manage

the reintegration of these prisoners into civilian life. They were left to their devices, especially in isolated neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher and Kabaria.

7.4.2 Contingent Moment #2 – Ennahda Removes Its Insistence on Shari'a Law in Tunisia's New Constitution

The second critical juncture took place in March 2012, when Rachid al-Ghannouchi, the head of Tunisia's largest political party, the centre-right religious Ennahda party, led Ennahda to remove its insistence that Tunisia's post-revolutionary constitution include references to shari'a law. After the 2011 revolution, Tunisians took advantage of the fall of the Ben Ali dictatorship to gather in small, local groups to learn more about religion and to call for more religion to be included in public life. After the revolution, many groups were excited by this prospect. This excitement helped explain why Ennahda, a religious political party previously banned by the Ben Ali dictatorship, won more votes in the Fall 2011 National Constituent Assembly election than the next 15 political parties combined (Wolf, 2017).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, AST initially supported Ennahda, which it thought would become the best avenue to achieve more of a role for religion in public life. It also, at first, supported Tunisia's post-revolutionary political transition. AST leaders encouraged its members to participate in Tunisia's elections in 2011 (Wolf, 2017). But in March 2012, in a small conference of leaders in Ennahda led by Ghannouchi, the party ultimately decided that they would not demand parts of shari'a law be included in the new constitution. The fear, according to several Ennahda party leaders present, was that pressing too hard on including Islamic law in Tunisia's new constitution would incur

a political backlash by secular-minded elites who supported the previous dictatorship (Sghaier, June 11, 2019; La'arayedh, July 3, 2019; Samir Dilo, June 12, 2019). Ennahda leadership feared that the country's largely secular political and business elites, along with many members of the security services who had served the previous regime, would collaborate on a counter-revolutionary coup. Ennahda chose to compromise with these elites to avoid what they worried about most – that these elites, not the Salafi-Jihadists, would rise up together under the pretext of upholding the country's secular laws and try to overthrow them. They need not look far for an example of to justify their fears, as Egypt's armed forces would depose Egypt's president, Mohammed Morsi, just over a year later.

By withdrawing its insistence on including shari'a law in Tunisia's draft constitution in March 2012, Ennahda replaced the threat of a counter-revolution from the country's former political and business elites with the threat of a rising, anti-government religious social movement. Yet Ennahda believed AST was not as big of a threat, in part because it hoped to influence the movement's political trajectory through its relationships with the group, whereas it did not believe it could control the secular elites. Ennahda's belief in AST proved short-sighted, and AST radically transformed after that moment from a social movement in support of Ennahda to an anti-government protest movement. Shari'a law is "God's rule on earth," according to Sayyid Qutb, a major intellectual influence on Salafi-Jihadism. Qutb, like many Salafi-Jihadis, believe rejecting shari'a was like rejecting the word of God and thus unforgivable (Qutb et al., 1995).

However, had Ennahda taken the other path and insisted on including shari'a law in the constitution, they may have sparked a counter-revolutionary coup similar to Egypt or Yemen. Had the country devolved into civil conflict, then the hubs of support for AST may have become hubs of recruitment for insurgents in a Tunisian civil war against secular *ancient regime* counterrevolutionaries instead. However, once Ennahda compromised with Tunisia's secular parties, AST transformed into a protest campaign that withdrew support not only for Ennahda but also for Tunisia's political transition in general. When AST became a protest campaign, it greatly reduced the possibility of the counterfactual outcome that some Ennahda leaders had hoped for: that AST would moderate over time by participating in the political process. Ennahda leaders saw AST moderating over time as a real possibility in 2012, and this message was part of a speech that Ennahda party founder Ghannouchi gave to AST supporters when he told them to go "slowly, slowly" with their demands (Marks, 2017). However, once Ennahda removed its insistence on including shari'a law, AST started seeing politics as an anathema to their organizational mission and its definition of progress toward a more Islamic society.

7.4.3 Contingent Moment #3 – AST Power Vacuum Empowers Hardliners

The violent, AST demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy in Tunis on September 14, 2012 carried on uninterrupted for hours, and eventually burned down a school where many American diplomats sent their children. This was AST as a protest movement. But the international and domestic backlash against such a stark failure of

the state security services to protect key assets was so severe that the Tunisian government had to act against AST. The government sent security services to arrest AST leader Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, but he escaped and smuggled himself into Libya. Al-Tunisi fleeing to Libya, however, left AST bereft of leadership – he could not keep control of the group when he was no longer present in Tunisia. A power struggle emerged among his deputies over who would control AST in Tunisia. As mentioned earlier, younger hardliners within AST wanted to drive the group towards a violent confrontation with state security services, while older moderates wanted to move more slowly. In the absence of a unifying figure like Abu lyadh, hardliners were freer to push their agenda.

AST hardliners seized the opportunity to control AST's trajectory in this moment and assassinated the leftist MP Choukri Belaid on February 6, 2013 (Ryan, 2013). Many suspected that a hard-line faction of AST deputies, involving Abu Ayub al-Tunisi and Boubaker el-Hakim, helped carry out Belaid's assassination in order to initiate conflict with the Tunisian state (Habib Sayah, June 8, 2019). La'arayedh, Tunisia's interior minister at the time, described the assassination as a "power play," where hardliners used violence to initiate state reprisals to justify their self-fulfilling belief that conflict was inevitable (July 3, 2019). The assassination led to political upheaval resulting in the resignation of the prime minister and a brief threat of government collapse (Wolf 2017).

The rise to power of AST hardliners paradoxically helped promote Ennahda hardliners. After February 2013, Ennahda wanted to show the Tunisian public that they took the threat of religious-based violence more seriously. La'arayedh, a senior leader of Ennahda, had argued in party meetings since 2011 that AST was a terrorist

organisation that would destabilise Tunisia (La'arayedh, June 8, 2019). Once Belaid was assassinated, La'arayedh's calls to confront AST became the dominant approach both in the leadership of the Tunisian government and as party policy within Ennahda. As a result, this third critical event caused a government shakeup that compelled Ennahda to adopt a hard-line position on AST. This shift in turn solidified AST hardliners' grip on their organization: once the state started fighting AST, the group had no choice but to adapt according to the plans of its hard-line members (Zelin, 2020). This shifted the path of AST in Tunisia from a protest movement to a political insurgency. It did not have to turn out this way. If political moderates within AST secured a clearer line of succession behind Abu lyadh, hardliners may have been in a more difficult position to co-opt the movement. AST could have been a protest movement, even an opposition political party, had moderates within the group seized the initiative. Instead, AST went from a protest movement with anti-government beliefs to an insurgent group bent on overthrowing the government by force.

7.4.4 Contingent Moment #4 – AST Declared a Terrorist Organisation

The fourth and final key moment of contingency that shaped the outcome of AST towards foreign fighting was the decision by the Tunisian government in August 2013 to designate AST a terrorist organization. Prime Minister La'arayedh announced the official declaration of AST on August 23, 2013. The result of La'arayedh's decision to designate members of AST as terrorists was that these members were declared criminals overnight, with dramatic impact in neighbourhoods where the group

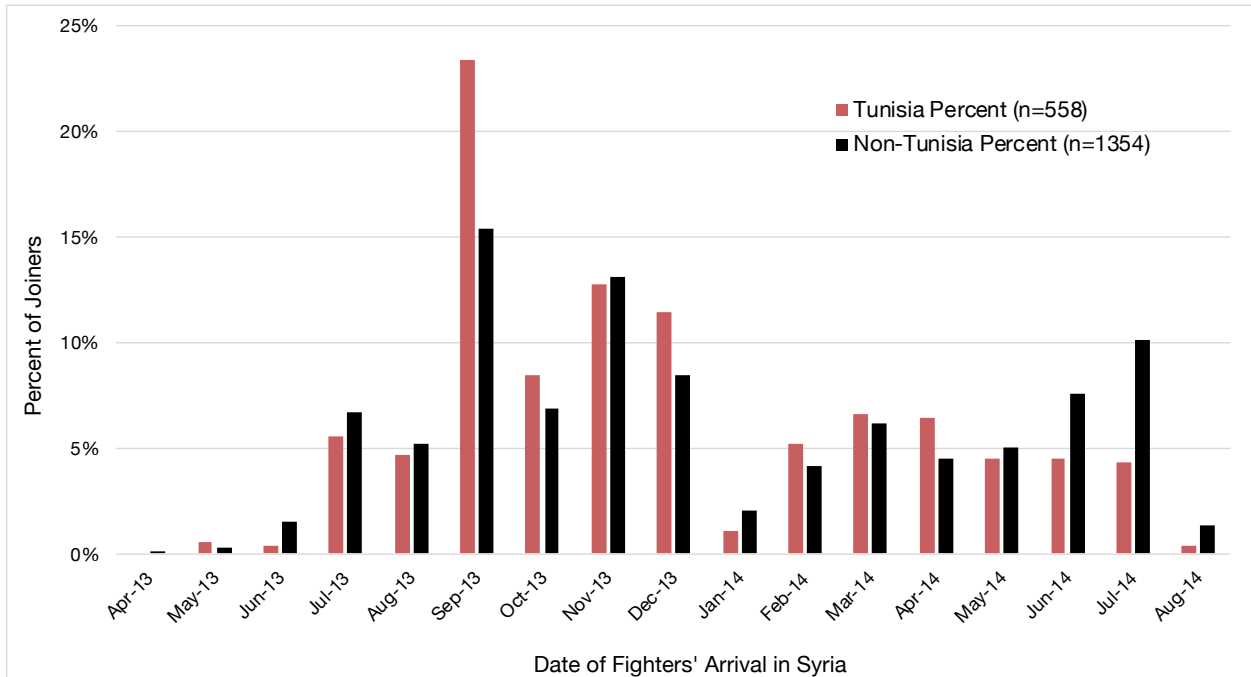
flourished, like in Douar Hicher. While some AST members had some small arms training, most did not join the group initially to become insurgents. The group and its members were surprised by La'arayedh's seemingly unilateral declaration. Rather than trying to fight the Tunisian state – a losing battle in their minds – many believed it was safer to join ISIS in Syria. ISIS by this time was also the logical extension of their own beliefs, which AST members could pursue without running the risk of immediate and obvious arrest at home. In some respects, fighting for ISIS in Syria became a replacement for the war they wanted to fight at home.

For AST, because their hard-line leaders in 2013 were new and their demands mainly political (based on previous contingent events, like Ennahda's decision not to push to include shari'a law in the constitution), they lacked plans from the outset to become an insurgency (Gartenstein-Ross, 2013; Zelin, 2019). As a result, AST attracted many members who were not prepared to take arms at the surprising moment they were declared terrorists. Members preferred to leave Tunisia rather than wage a domestic insurgency, because fighting with an established insurgency abroad seemed safer than the uncertainty of starting a new one in Tunisia (Imad, July 3, 2019).

The dramatic shift for AST members from potential domestic insurgents to foreign fighters bears out in the data on arrivals of Tunisian foreign fighters to ISIS in Syria. According to the registration forms, Tunisian arrivals spiked in September 2013, the month after the declaration of AST as a terrorist organization (see Figure 7.2). Nearly one-quarter of all Tunisian foreign fighters documented in the registration forms arrived

in Syria in September 2013, the month after they were designated terrorists by La'arayedh's government.

Figure 7.2 Percent of Foreign Fighters Joining ISIS Per Month



Source: ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms; compiled by author

These four contingent moments show that joining AST at first did not mean to join ISIS. Likewise, it was not a foregone conclusion that a hub of Salafi-Jihadism, like Douar Hicher, would become a hub of foreign fighters for ISIS in Syria. Rather, the transformation of AST from a political organization to a protest campaign, and from a protest campaign to an insurgency, was contingent on certain choices made by key individuals at crucial moments in Tunisia's post-revolutionary political transition. These contingent moments show that, while certain structural conditions may help us understand how hubs form and function, situational factors are important to determine what recruits ultimately do in them.

7.5 Conclusion

Overall, this chapter offers two key conclusions: the first is why one neighbourhood transformed into an ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hub while a second neighbourhood did not despite sharing many of the same characteristics as the first. The second key conclusion is that, while certain structural conditions can help us identify regions with higher probabilities of becoming hubs of support for certain causes, the pathway from those conditions to the mobilization of foreign fighters depends on contingent outcomes and the endogenous process of identity formation. These two conclusions are intertwined. Together they explain how certain factors lead to a hub forming, and how that hub forming can, under certain contingent circumstances, lead to that hub forming for foreign fighting.

First this chapter explained how a local power vacuum in Douar Hicher gave AST the opportunity to take over the neighbourhood, while the presence of a pre-existing social hierarchy denied them that same opportunity in Kabaria. This thesis argues that the presence or absence of social hierarchy was the key difference between Douar Hicher and Kabaria. Opportunity existed for AST to take over Douar Hicher but that same opportunity did not in Kabaria, despite the same levels of chaos in post-revolutionary Tunisia and despite the two neighbourhood sharing many of the same underlying socioeconomic and demographic conditions. The relative lack of social hierarchy in Douar Hicher gave AST a chance to take over the neighbourhood, which gave residents more opportunities and reasons to join AST than in Kabaria. Those myriad pathways into the group in Douar Hicher set AST supporters on a contingent

path that eventually led to foreign fighting, but could have also led to domestic insurgency or even contentious politics depending on choices of a few key individuals at critical junctures in Tunisia's tense post-revolutionary political situation. The likelihood of accessing those contingent pathways was more remote for residents in Kabaria, because residents banded together to keep AST recruiters out of the neighbourhood.

By contrast, people in Douar Hicher identified more strongly as AST members when confronted by state security. Rather than re-evaluate their original motivations for joining AST in light of heightened state scrutiny, some AST members in Douar Hicher dug in and were more firmly committed to the group even as it shifted from a social movement to, eventually, an insurgency. Yet the literature on explaining why so many joined ISIS (i.e., Abdel Jelil et al., 2018; Benmelech and Klor, 2018; Mishali-Ram 2018; Byman, 2019), or on why so many Tunisians joined ISIS (i.e., Balboni and Malka, 2016; Lounnas, 2019), rarely considers important counterfactuals to foreign fighting, or the extent to which multiple possible futures existed at key inflection points in Tunisia's post-revolutionary political transition. Nor do they describe how what initially motivated people to participate in Salafi-Jihadism may have been significantly different from the end outcome of their becoming foreign fighters Syria.

This contingent sequence of events and outcomes occurred during moments when key actors recognized the absence of a "pre-established script" (Ermakoff, 2015, p. 90). During these moments, people have to "work harder than ever to make sense of the world around them," particularly by trying to "learn what others are planning to do" so that each person can "figure out what to do [them]selves" (Kurzman, 2004, p. 135).

The highly social nature of sensemaking in moments of contingency meant that individuals who had been active members of AST would naturally want to follow what others in the group were doing at these key moments.

This chapter also highlights how rare and coincidental foreign fighting can be and warns against drawing a straight line between the outcome of foreign fighting and the conditions that might have predicted it. Tunisia's experience with ISIS foreign fighter recruitment is an ideal illustration of this point; it was a country with potentially the highest rate of ISIS foreign fighters in the world. Yet it might have just as easily had a markedly lower rate had certain events turned out differently. That there were so many possible counterfactuals in Tunisia should caution us against telling a deterministic story about Tunisian foreign fighters in hindsight; the country could have easily become a place of armed rebellion rather than an exporter of foreign fighters. Situational factors played crucial roles in determining why Tunisia had more foreign fighters per capita than any other country in the Middle East; we cannot pinpoint structural conditions alone that determined Tunisia's fate.

CHAPTER 8 | CONCLUSION

Hubs and Foreign Fighter Recruitment

“Hitler...knows that human beings don't only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice...Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.”

- George Orwell, Review of Mein Kampf, 1940

Introduction

This study began with the observation that the thousands of foreign fighters who joined ISIS were concentrated in a small number of towns and neighbourhoods. This initial observation about the importance of hubs sparked a single question: why did the hubs of ISIS recruitment emerge in these places and not elsewhere? This question drove the dissertation project, but investigating it yielded new questions as I tried to understand the relationship between hubs of recruitment forming and fighters leaving their home countries to join ISIS in Syria. How do hubs form? Why does recruitment work more effectively in hubs? And why do hubs form for foreign fighting as opposed to rebellion, protest, rioting, or other organized, high-risk activity? Together, these questions comprise the scope of a research project the intends to explain how hubs work as comprehensively as possible in order to provide future research with a sufficiently developed analytical framework for testing in other contexts.

This dissertation first needed to prove that hubs were important enough to the process of becoming a foreign fighter that they should be studied in their own right. This

dissertation concluded that hubs were important not only in affecting how many fighters joined ISIS, but also the types of people who joined ISIS. As a result, research aiming to uncover their motivations for joining a transnational insurgency ought to account for *how* those fighters were recruited in order to better understand *why* they joined. Once I established that hubs of foreign fighter recruitment were critical to the pathways into transnational insurgency, the rest of the dissertation set out to develop as comprehensive a picture of foreign fighter recruitment hubs as possible.

This conclusion summarizes the findings of this dissertation and is divided into three parts. The first part summarizes the dissertation's key findings – from why hubs form where they form, to how they form where they form, to how they work where they form, and, finally, why they form for foreign fighting in particular. The second part discusses the generalizability of this dissertation's finding – where else might a theory of recruitment hubs apply? The purpose of this section is to spur creative thinking on where to apply and test the theory of hubs, following Laitin's encouragement for the social sciences to function as a collaborative enterprise (Laitin, 2000). Third and finally, the conclusion presents recommendations for future research and several considerations for policymakers. There remain tens of thousands of ISIS foreign fighters unaccounted for; they are neither in prison in Syria nor have they returned to the countries they came from. This dissertation considers some of the ways government policy may better deal with the challenge of foreign fighters by more carefully considering the contexts in which they are recruited.

8.1. Summarizing Key Research Questions About Hubs

8.1.1. Where did hubs form?

The primary empirical goal of this dissertation was to make clear how important a small number of places were for the recruitment of the majority of fighters who joined ISIS. Recruitment hubs were the engine of ISIS's recruitment effort in the Arabic-speaking world: the majority of ISIS fighters from the region were recruited from provinces that represented a minority of the region's population. But hubs also appeared to be the gateway for new fighters to enter the movement: fighters recruited from hubs were younger and less likely to have combat experience than fighters recruited from non-hubs. Fighters from hubs were better educated but were not as well off professionally as fighters from non-hubs. This makes intuitive sense since foreign fighting requires a certain amount of material resources as well as personal connections. In hubs, where more people can work together in common cause, it is easier to acquire these resources. Whereas in non-hubs potential recruits were more likely to need to rely on their own connections to make it to Syria. Finally, hubs appear to have moderated parts of the profile of fighters who joined relative to the places they came from: in hubs, fighters appeared to be more normal relative to the places they came from than fighters recruited from non-hubs.

Provinces that were hubs had distinct characteristics. They formed where there were large numbers of people in wealthy countries who were not finding pathways to economic mobility and where a political opportunity emerged that gave a new social movement the change to emerge and re-order local politics in certain localities. These

subnational variations were important. While many hubs formed in wealthy countries in the Arabic-speaking world, provinces were more likely to be hubs if they had higher rates of household spending, better access to the Internet, and slowing population growth rates. Second, provinces that were hubs had higher rates of unemployment among university graduates.

Yet these factors describe province-level geographies that are useful in understanding subnational variation but have certain limits in understanding the how and under what conditions fighters are recruited. The first is that the proportions of people recruited remained quite small. Even in the most prolific hubs, approximately 15 to 20 fighters were recruited to join ISIS in 100,000 people. Although that proportion rises ninefold when considering that, at least in Tunisia, there were nine times more people who tried but failed to reach Syria as those who made it successfully, the percent of joiners and attempted joiners is still below one percent. These small probabilities raise the importance of understanding how individual motivations interact with endogenous shifts in identity construction and the relational impact of place and interpersonal relationships. This low probability outcome is a crucial reason why policies that attempt to counteract terrorist recruitment using large-scale structural interventions, for example investing in rebuilding schools, usually fail to achieve the desired effect. First, these investments should be made in communities regardless of whether one person in 10,000 is at risk of joining a terrorist group. But second, and more important, the process of recruitment is deeper and more complex than a large, one-dimensional

policy intervention. The isolation of hubs, for example, is multidimensional – it is social, political, and economic.

More detailed data on fighter origins, and more detailed census data on towns and city neighbourhoods would also be essential for future research to advance our knowledge on the local conditions that recruitment hubs share in common. As these are rarely available, statistical analysis paired with carefully selected sites for fieldwork – the methods utilized in this research – are the next best option given limitations. The qualitative findings later in the dissertation that zoom into the localities where recruitment takes place in Tunisia deepen the statistical findings. For the first factor – that wealthy provinces were more likely to have larger numbers of foreign fighter recruits – the fieldwork generally found that poorer parts of wealthy provinces were where recruitment occurred, a finding that adds evidence to Lee's conclusions (2011). For the second factor – that provinces with higher rates of overeducated and under employed persons are more likely to have been ISIS recruitment hubs – this result has as much to do with a wider set of discriminatory factors than a finding about individual-level conditions. Third and finally, provinces that became ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs were much more likely to emerge in countries like Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen that experienced political transitions as a result of the 2010-11 Arab Spring. But these transitions were not the only type of political opportunity that formed at a national level. Countries like Saudi Arabia, whose government did not change in composition but whose political support for rebels in Syria gave citizens the chance to organize with limited oversight, also opened the door to political mobilization.

The statistical analysis in Chapter Four showed that several explanations working together explained that ISIS recruitment hubs formed in relatively wealthy places where grievances combined with opportunities. But there were many places where people had grievances, and political opportunities could form as a result of revolutionary transitions (i.e., Tunisia), as well as in places where there was political support for insurgents fighting the Syrian government (i.e., Saudi Arabia). The process of a hub forming emerges more clearly when Chapters Five and Six compare the neighbourhoods of Douar Hicher and Kabaria in Tunis. These neighbourhoods shared nearly every one of the characteristics described above yet varied starkly on the rate of ISIS foreign fighters: Douar Hicher became one of the largest foreign fighter recruitment hubs in Tunisia, a country that had one of the highest rates of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment in the world, while few residents of Kabaria joined ISIS. This difference suggests that a combination of grievance plus opportunity still leaves a large part of the recruitment puzzle unanswered.

The comparison between Douar Hicher and Kabaria suggest that structural, macroeconomic factors alone cannot explain why some areas became hubs and some did not. This research demonstrates that recruitment hubs were socially, politically, and economically isolated. Residents, facing social discrimination, found it hard to lobby for their interests, formalize their citizenship or ownership, or secure gainful economic opportunity through formal channels. Yet these dilemmas were true in Douar Hicher and in Kabaria. The key difference between these two isolated neighbourhoods in the suburbs of Tunis was that the former had limited means of organizing and protecting the community in the absence of state involvement (i.e., tribal structures, intermarriage,

local notables, formal political organizations, business associations, or worker's unions). In Douar Hicher, the limited forms of social hierarchy meant that, when state security dissolved after the revolution, a new group could take advantage of the power vacuum. Young people did organize in Douar Hicher to protect their neighbourhoods after the revolution (Allal, 2011), but they were spontaneous and easily co-opted by AST. In Kabaria, a stronger social hierarchy meant the community could more effectively self-govern in the chaos after the revolution. "To a man we defended our neighborhood" explained Haykal and Mohammed, two Kabarians from Houmt el Marché (March 1, 2020).

8.1.2. How did hubs form?

A hub formed first for recruitment into AST before it transformed into a recruitment hub for ISIS foreign fighters. The AST recruitment hub started when a small group of local supporters crossed a certain threshold where members were no longer part of one network of friends, but membership in AST jumped across friend networks. From the beginning, AST drew from three different networks: 1) ex-convicts released from prison on terrorism charges in the first few weeks following the revolution; 2) Salafi preachers who had been exiled under the previous regime; and 3) curious, mostly young people who had previously lacked access to religious education. After the revolution, these three networks converged and gave AST a wider base of potential members to recruit from than anyone anticipated. This gave residents in hubs the sense that these groups started small but grew into a large, well organized nationwide grassroots organization virtually overnight.

These first-mover cadres were essential in developing the first study groups in neighbourhoods across Tunisia, including in Douar Hicher. The first movers joined together only because AST leadership – including charismatic and media savvy spokesmen, ideologues who designed well-crafted curricula of indoctrination, and ‘sons of the Ḥūma’ who brought stories home to Tunisia from wars fought abroad – gave these disparate networks of supporters a political agenda that unified them around the idea of transforming Tunisia into an Islamic state. Their crucial role in developing these hubs and sustaining them could be the focus of an entirely separate but related study (see Section 8.3.1 for more on research implications). Taking inspiration and guidance from their leadership, the Salafi-Jihadis of Douar Hicher started implementing this agenda locally: once they took over 11 out of 12 local mosques, they had a physical presence to organize activities and an ability to proselytize to a much larger audience. They also began protecting residents and setting up neighbourhood watch units that brought more stability to the neighbourhood than the state had achieved.

The community described how stark the situation in the neighbourhood appeared to change. AST had accomplished something in a span of only a few months that the Tunisian government and its vast resources and security apparatus had seemingly never accomplished. AST’s policing of delinquent behaviour was a welcome change for residents who previously feared leaving their home at night. Mothers were also happy that their sons, many of whom had been involved in drinking, gang violence, and petty crime appeared to be pious Muslims. Meanwhile, AST members took pride in their work. They believed taking over these neighbourhoods, including preaching in

mosques and patrolling the streets, was evidence of the worthiness of their cause. In their minds, creating AST recruitment hubs in these neighbourhood was the first step in a broader project to transform Tunisia into a more Islamic state.

Hubs formed when a group bent on governance took over the neighbourhood and installed a pseudo government providing local services like cultural production and, critically, protection. The cultural production justified the mission – to turn neighbourhoods like Douar Hicher into better, more Islamic societies. The protection ensured the group could collect information on recruits, helped it coerce silence in some residents, and persuade allegiance in others. In this way, AST created hubs all over Tunisia.

8.1.3. How did hubs function?

The more AST's control over the hub grew, the easier it was to recruit each additional member. Recruiters could make a case study of each potential joiner, knowing everything about them before ever approaching them. Meanwhile, the logic of participation expanded in recruitment hubs. First, potential joiners had more reasons to join. In Douar Hicher, for example, AST provided services like community protection and managing the local economy. As a result, joining in the hub could offer protection against state and local law enforcement or the possibility of financial reward, as well as a measure power or social prestige that most members had never before achieved. Second, potential recruits had more opportunities to join. In Douar Hicher, they would see members of AST seemingly everywhere – in their cafes, mosques, at major

intersections, policing their neighbourhoods. They would also learn that some of their friends or others they knew had decided to join. These gave potential recruits more opportunities to consider joining AST than they might have had otherwise.

One interpretation of the argument of this dissertation is that it implies that it is impossible for a theory of individual motivations to be formulated. Instead, the goal of this dissertation was to argue that in certain places there is a potentially far more diverse number of reasons why someone would join ISIS than in most other places. In most places, information about joining ISIS would be relatively scarce. A recruit interested in joining ISIS would need to be very enterprising: they would need to make contact with someone in the group, likely on the Internet, and would need to find and raise the money to travel to Syria. In recruitment hubs, there were more reasons to join and fewer perceived costs. This made it easier to decide to join, but that does not absolve joiners of agency. The range of motivations were greater in hubs than outside them, with the implication being that, like Humphreys and Weinstein argued in their study of insurgent recruitment in Sierra Leone, the context in which someone is being recruited matters (2008). While this dissertation focused more on explaining the structural dynamics of hubs – how they form and function, how they affect the propensity of certain people to join over others – it should not leave the reader with the belief that the individual motivations of the joiners were unimportant.

These recruitment hubs were larger than previous research on the topic had ever observed (i.e., Sageman, 2004). They were observable social phenomena that were so large that by the time they were fully operational, the groups involved were no longer

recruiting within the community; they were filtering out potential joiners and choosing the most attractive candidates for membership.

The outsized role hubs had on recruitment also moderated the relationship between ISIS foreign fighters and the conditions in the provinces they came from. All of this suggests that, in hubs, fighters who were recruited were younger than those in non-hubs but otherwise had more typical characteristics relative to the places that they came from. With an expanded logic attracting a wider range of potential joiners, hubs were recruiting a wider range of people, while people recruited from non-hubs had to have more connections to the transnational jihadist movement to join.

8.1.4. What did hubs form for?

In *Dynamics of Contention*, a study by McAdam et al. (2001) of 18 contentious episodes since the French Revolution, the authors' purpose was to: "identify crucial causal mechanisms that recur in a wide variety of contention, but produce different aggregate outcomes depending on the initial conditions, combinations, and sequences in which they occur" (2001, p. 37). Their combination of structural and situational factors applies to this study of the emergence of foreign fighter recruitment hubs. Certain structural factors were essential for the formation of hubs – they needed to form in places that lacked well-established social hierarchies, there needed to be an opportunity for a new social movement to form, and a grievance they could use to galvanize the population. But the situational factors mattered as well. The contingency in which the outcome of foreign fighting was ultimately determined made clear that this outcome is

far from certain. What recruitment hubs formed for (i.e., foreign fighting as opposed to protest, domestic insurgency, or illegal migration) varied depending on the context. Such findings highlight the “contingency, emotionality, plasticity, and interactive character of movement politics” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 15).

This dissertation also aims to avoid making its conclusions “too narrow,” as McAdam et al. concluded about the study of political contention (2001, p. 7). This narrowness is particularly true for the study of terrorism, within which foreign fighting is often situated. Terrorism studies regularly exists in a universe of its own, despite the fact that terrorism is generally a rare and usually counterproductive tactic wielded by weak insurgents – a “resource,” not an identity (Kalyvas, 2004, p. 100). Boyle concluded in his study of the terrorism discipline that it is necessary to relocate the study of terrorists and terrorist groups within the broader field of political violence (2012). This dissertation sought to build on that conclusion, not only to expand the shared enterprise of knowledge generation beyond the narrowing boundaries of disciplines, as McAdam et al. warned about, but also because this dissertation found that the structural conditions that describe where a hub of foreign fighters emerged could easily shift into other types of contentious politics or insurgent group behaviour should the mechanisms and processes specific to the contexts in which they emerged vary. This study offers one example of how such structural and contextual differences affect the outcome: that foreign fighting in one neighbourhood (Douar Hicher) could shift to participating in organized criminal activity in another, similar neighbourhood nearby (Kabaria), with only a few key differences.

This dissertation finds that where hubs form and how they function may have many similarities across different types of contention, but what hubs form for varies based on situational factors that are difficult to predict. In a 2015 retroactive look at two networks of foreign fighters who travelled to Iraq in 2003-05 from Europe, Holman finds they were purposefully formed for foreign fighting. Further, Holman finds that many terrorist attacks in Europe were perpetrated by fringe elements of these foreign fighter networks – essentially people who could not, for various reasons, become foreign fighters (2015). Holman’s work might seem to contradict the findings presented here regarding the contingency of foreign fighting, because the implications of the work are that foreign fighting is not so contingent on choices but can be a product of an observed pattern.

But a close read finds that Holman’s findings are more of a complement to this dissertation than a contradiction. One of two networks Holman studies starts with the story of Boubaker el Hakim – the leader of a foreign fighter network from France and later one of the cadre of AST officials responsible for the group’s shift to militancy. El Hakim chose to leave Paris’ 19th Arrondissement to study in Syria in 2000, and from Syria he joined the incipient insurgency in Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003. His influence on others from the 19th Arr. to join him in Iraq was based on what Holman describes as the “contours (friends), ambitions (defending Islam), and the network’s core members” (2015, p. 605)

Holman’s approach complements this one because he acknowledges the importance of interpersonal connections and the influence of a leadership cadre on the

decision-making of people in the network. But the difference between Holman's study and this one is this dissertation aims to explain why those leaders chose foreign fighting to begin with. Re-analysing the subjects in Holman's study, this research would try to explain the context surrounding El Hakim's decision to travel to Iraq from Syria, which Holman lists as one of the top origin countries for foreign fighters to Iraq in the 2000s. This thesis would expect Boubaker to have first been involved a hub of recruitment in Syria before influencing his friends and relatives in France. It is the Syrian hub of recruitment - and how it became a hub specifically for foreign fighting - that would be the key for this thesis to examine.

This dissertation worked forward from the choices people made that eventually led them to become foreign fighters, rather than starting from the fact that they were foreign fighters and working backward. In so doing, this dissertation showed how AST had an opportunity to emerge in certain neighbourhoods and not others, and that those neighbourhoods shared certain key characteristics. But the way the group's members self-identified, and perhaps even the purpose of the group itself, were greatly affected by the events in post-revolutionary Tunisia. AST transformed three times in two years: it changed from a social movement to a protest movement after Ennahda leadership removed their insistence that shari'a law being included in the new Tunisian constitution; it changed from a protest movement to an incipient insurgency once AST's leader fled to Libya and hardliners within the group seized the initiative, and it changed again from an incipient insurgency to a feeder organization sending foreign fighters to ISIS in Libya, Syria, and Iraq once the group was declared a terrorist organization in August 2013. In

hindsight, many have tried to explain why Tunisia became a locus of ISIS foreign fighters (Cragin, 2019; Lounnas, 2019; Ajala, 2019). But by telling the story forward from Tunisia's revolution until the moment many in Douar Hicher went to Syria, this dissertation found that Tunisia's foreign fighter hubs could have just as easily been the locus of a domestic insurgency had choices been made differently by a small number of people at several critical junctures.

8.2. Generalizability – Where Else Might We See Hubs Emerge?

Section 8.1 of this conclusion summarized the findings of this dissertation specifically on the question of ISIS foreign fighter recruitment in the Arabic-speaking world. This section asks about generalizability: where else should we see hubs form? It argues that we should observe recruitment hubs forming not just for foreign fighting in the Arabic-speaking world, but for a variety of other high risk organized activity. Indeed, recruitment concentrated in hubs for domestic insurgents are covered by a rich pre-existing literature (e.g., Toolis, 1991; Blanchard, 2001). Moreover, disproportionate concentrations of the origins of combatants appear to play an important role in affecting not just one's propensity for joining a domestic or foreign conflict, they also affect one's willingness to fight as that conflict is raging. Gould, for example, studied the Paris Commune revolt of 1871 and found that "pre-existing social ties among neighbours" – in other words, pre-conflict social relationships based on geographic proximity – helped "maintain solidarity in the insurgent ranks" (1991, p. 727). Recruitment hubs may also affect unit solidarity in the reverse direction: Bearman's study of Confederate Army

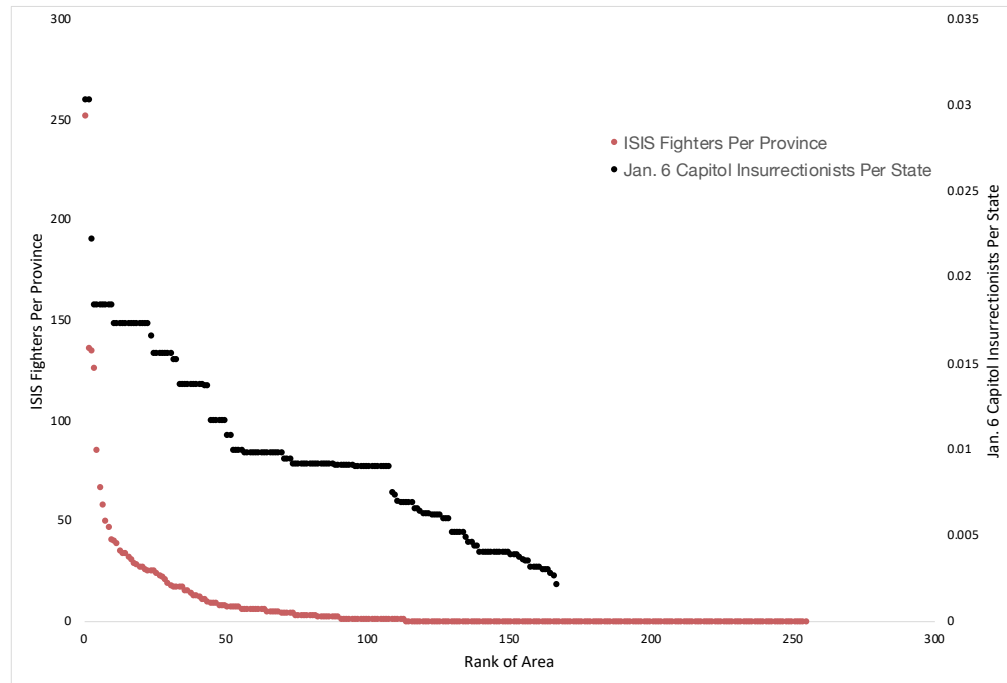
defections during the U.S. Civil War found that units tended to lose more soldiers the more those soldiers joined from the same town. “Unit solidarity may induce greater commitment to army goals,” he wrote, “but not necessarily. If the collective is defined on a basis different from the military, soldiers may pursue ends quite different from those expected” (Bearman, 1991, p. 340).

As shown before in Figure 2.1, graphing ISIS foreign fighters by their origins shows a power law-like distribution. One of the testable hypotheses to emerge from this dissertation is that we should see other geographies of recruitment have similar distributions. These distributions should follow the Pareto principle, which stipulates that 80 percent of the consequences come from 20 percent of the causes (Pareto, 1964; Hardy, 2010). This was followed in the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization: 75 percent of the fighters came from provinces that represented 18 percent of the total provinces of the Arabic-speaking world, and 11 percent of the cumulative population of the region. Therefore, one hypothesis that future research could test is that we should expect to see power law-like distributions emerge when examining the geographic origins of recruits for a variety of organized, high-risk activity (i.e., foreign fighting, domestic insurgency, protests, riots).

One example where we may see similar distributions is the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Figure 8.1 compares the geographic origins of ISIS foreign fighters with the state origins of the first 221 individuals arrested for their involvement in storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. As with the ISIS foreign fighters, I indexed the Jan. 6 insurrectionist’s origins by the population of their home states. It does appear,

tentatively, that a power law-like curve also applies for the January 6 storming of the U.S. Capitol, showing recruitment centred on a few key places.

Figure 8.1 ISIS Foreign Fighters and Jan. 6, 2021 Insurrectionists



Source: ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms; U.S. Department of Justice; compiled by author

Hubs of recruitment are also apparent in foreign mercenary recruitment networks. For example, in a study of ethnic Baloch recruits from Pakistan to the Bahraini military and police, Lutfi zoomed in on Qiyamahsari, “a small Baloch enclave tucked in the centre of Karachi – in which almost every family had ties with either retired or serving Bahraini soldiers” (Lutfi, 2018, p. 242). Lutfi describes how this hub of recruitment emerged in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s when “Bahrain was desperate for able bodied men, and the Baloch were first in line” (2018, p. 245). But when Bahrain’s government imposed regulations on their recruitment of foreign militants (i.e., education and professional experience), the recruitment process became more formalised and the Baloch of Qiyamahsari, who generally lack formal certifications, were squeezed out of

their formerly profitable career track (2018, p. 251). Although these mercenaries are more professionalized forms of soldiery than the more inexperienced foreign fighters that joined ISIS, it does appear as though certain neighbourhoods functioned similarly as key sites for recruitment.

The testable hypothesis that emerges from this dissertation is that we should see geographic concentrations of recruits for participation in many kinds of contentious politics - not just foreign fighting. The same hub-like process that occurred for the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization should also emerge for protests or domestic insurgency as well. Even the story of Kabaria underscores research on certain locations where organized crime concentrates (Varese, 2001; 2011). Recruitment hubs function in effect like economies of scale for businesses – if they can be developed, they are highly efficient sites for recruitment.

8.3. Research and Policy Implications

This dissertation emphasized the outsized importance of recruitment hubs on the ISIS foreign fighter mobilization. It provided a detailed explanation of the structural and situational factors that led hubs to form in certain places and not others. It presented a theory of recruitment hubs as comprehensively as possible, with the purpose of conveying a broad understanding of why hubs are important and how they work. The hope is that the findings presented here add to our understanding of how people are recruited to become foreign fighters. To help that research agenda progress, this section

first outlines new avenues for research (8.3.1) on recruitment hubs before considering the policy implications (8.3.2) of these findings on foreign fighter recruitment.

8.3.1 Research Implications

This dissertation makes clear that research on foreign fighting needs to consider how people are recruited when studying why people are recruited, considering the importance of hubs on the number and types of people who become foreign fighters. However, no study working on a subject as sensitive as recruitment into ISIS will have unimpeachable data or methods. The topic of how someone becomes convinced to join a transnational insurgency is fraught with complexity – decades of psychological work on the subject have yet to build a generalizable profile (Horgan, 2003). These are challenges to the field of research on foreign fighters that cannot be ignored but instead should be accepted and understood as best as possible. The best way to face this challenge is to engage in cumulative social science – to build on initial findings with a rigorous program of additional research (Varese, 2021). I outline four questions future research could test on different parts of this theory presented on recruitment hubs.

The first question to test for this theory is to examine the extent to which hubs apply to other foreign fighter mobilizations. This could examine historical or new cases of transnational jihadist conflicts, or test mobilizations of other ISIS fighters from different regions of the world. But it need not focus on transnational jihadism. There are 17,000 foreign fighters fighting in the Ukraine as of this writing – are these fighters being recruited in hubs as well? (MacKinzie and Kaunert, 2021)

A second question is to test the characteristics that hubs share in common. This dissertation presented statistical analysis about the traits ISIS foreign fighter recruitment hubs shared in common. It also provided some more detailed explanation by comparative case study. But these results were limited by available data and focused solely on the Arabic-speaking world. With more fine-grained data, or with data on different regions, future research could test what other factors might describe where hubs form.

Table 8.1 Future Research Options on Recruitment Hubs

	Research Question	Research Options
Question 1	Where else do hubs form in recruitment?	Foreign fighters in different regions; Other types of contentious political activity (i.e., foreign or domestic insurgency, gang or organized crime)
Question 2	What are the structural commonalities between hubs?	More detailed testing of the structural characteristics that lead recruitment hubs to form.
Question 3	Can we learn more about how hubs form?	More case studies on the process of a hub forming if given the right conditions – can vary by outcome (i.e., foreign fighting) or geographic region.
Question 4	How important is contingency on what hubs form for?	Comparative case studies testing two similar recruitment hubs that vary on the outcome of interest, in this case whether a hub forms for foreign fighting and a counterfactual outcome (i.e., domestic insurgency or protest).

Source: Compiled by author.

A third question would be to test the process in which hubs form. This would be more appropriate for qualitative research at this point in order to describe thickly the process in which a group gains control over a locality. This dissertation described a process in which a political opportunity made it possible for Salafi-Jihadis in Tunis to

take over the mosques and streets of certain neighbourhoods. A conclusion that emerges from this study is the importance of first-mover groups – in the case of Tunisia, the combination of parolees, returning exiles, and curious young people. These first movers were brought together by a savvy leadership who was key in giving a grassroots movement a common cause. Shifts in that same leadership's composition and priorities also had dramatic effects on the group's purpose and the activities of its members. How does the process of hubs forming change in different regions and for different types of groups? Are first movers and the leadership cadre still crucial to the formation of hubs and what its members do in them?

A fourth question would be to explore the contingency of what hubs form for in more detail. This dissertation argues that we can describe how hubs form and function, but what they form for is too contingent on local situational factors to predict. Where a foreign fighter hub might emerge and where a hub of recruitment for domestic insurgency might emerge depend on certain choices made at critical junctures by a small number of people. This fourth line of research could test the validity of this claim or use a comparative analysis of different recruitment pathways for fighters, gang members, organized criminal group members, and other contentious political activity to see whether there are common traits associated with the key choices made by different groups at certain moments. This would help determine the potential pathway for future groups engaged in contentious politics based on the choices made by their leaders or other key individuals in key moments. These studies, no matter the design, could also employ more advanced methods, following research such as horizontal inequalities (i.e.,

Cederman et al., 2011; Cederman, 2014) or econometrics (i.e., Raudenbush and Sampson, 1999).

In the end, this study seeks to push scholars who study the recruitment of individuals into high-risk organized activities like foreign fighting to consider more carefully the experience of the individual as they make their first steps towards militancy. Research on ISIS foreign fighters tends to focus on how fighters were pulled in to ISIS by their rationale for war, by their flashy propaganda, or by their effective outreach to potential recruits online. Instead, this dissertation focused on the fighters' local context, including not just where they were recruited but how they were recruited. It concludes that this context played an important role in affecting who joined and what their motivations were for doing so. It seems clear from this dissertation that, whatever the motivations of a foreign fighter might be – a sense of adventure, a desire for belonging, the benefits of camaraderie, the economic allure of a soldier's salary and the possibility for war booty, the pleasure of agency, the fear of being killed or arrested – they joined from the outside in, not the inside out.

The importance of local dynamics far from the battlefield underscores the “disjunction between identities and actions” presented by Kalyvas (2004, p. 475). Kalyvas highlighted a crucial cleavage between the centre and the periphery in understanding conflict dynamics in civil wars: the further out onto the periphery of a conflict one examines, the more the violence relates to local or private issues rather than the war's driving cleavage. The findings of this dissertation suggest it is possible to extend this argument to foreign fighter recruitment – with foreign fighters situated on the

periphery, distant physically and cognitively from the war's central cleavage. From the conclusion that foreign fighters joined ISIS from the outside in, the title of this dissertation becomes clear: all jihad is local.

8.3.2 Policy Implications

Recent research on foreign fighting tells us they worsen civil wars they join, one of the key reasons why policymakers need to pay attention to what foreign fighters do. When foreign fighters intervene in another country's civil conflict, they prolong civil wars by making them harder and more complicated to resolve (Langø, 2018); exacerbate human suffering within those conflicts because foreign combatants are less likely to be restrained in the violence they carry out against civilian populations (Chu and Braithwaite, 2017); undermine local efforts to resolve conflict by interrupting traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (Doctor, 2020; Doctor and Willingham, 2020); legitimize transnational movements that call for the use of violence to advance a political agenda (Moore, 2019; Mampilly, 2011); and are uniquely persistent in the Middle East—meaning that those who become foreign fighters are more likely than other ideologically motivated foreign fighters to continue to drift from conflict to conflict (Malet, 2015). Foreign fighters can also commit terrorist attacks when they return to their countries of origin, although this is far less common than returning foreign fighters recruiting new joiners to future conflicts (Malet and Hayes, 2020). It is therefore important from a policy standpoint to consider ways of limiting the number of foreign fighters. Doing so does not just reduce

the potential threat that foreign fighters themselves pose, but also it may reduce the duration, complexity, and intensity of conflict around the world.

The first policy recommendation that flows from this dissertation's findings is that governments should work harder to identify where hubs are. If this dissertation's findings are correct, we should observe hubs of recruitment form not only for waves of foreign fighting in the future, but also likely for domestic insurgent recruitment, gang and organized criminal recruitment, and even recruitment to other risky acts of political contention (i.e., protests or strikes). It is unclear that policy formulated to address the flows of foreign fighters to conflicts around the world has ever systematically documented the subnational variation of foreign fighter origins in order to prioritize responses that address the local dynamics where these fighters are recruited. The first step would be to invest more in researching where foreign fighters are coming from in order to understand more visibly how they are joining an insurgent group fighting in another country's civil war. Are they being recruited in hubs? If so, how did those hubs form and what kinds of policy interventions are possible to break up the cycle of recruitment there?

The second policy recommendation is to focus on the leadership cadres in charge of running these recruitment hubs. Policymakers too often aim for universal solutions, assuming the challenge is homogenous when the reality is the opposite. The Tunisia case is instructive: although 3,000 fighters joined ISIS from Tunisia, and another 27,000 were detained trying to reach Syria or Iraq, my estimates are that approximately 20 people oversaw their recruitment. The scarce resources of counterterrorism and law

enforcement should be placed on prosecuting cases against those key leaders. A contemporary example is in al-Hol, a displacement and detention facilities for thousands of ISIS fighters and 65,000 women and children in northeast Syria (UNOCHA, 2020). Al-Hol is a recruitment hub. Although some programs work in the camps to diagnose the extent of the psychological trauma and the level of radicalization of people who are there, these efforts ignore the social hierarchy in the camp. Leaders of the displacement camp, for example, enforce behavior through threats and policing dissent, including burning people's tents if they disavow ISIS (Mironova, 2020). This power dynamic – irrespective of the level of radicalization – enforces behaviour to the camp, to the point that espousing ISIS beliefs remains safer than ignoring them. The only way to change the dynamic in al-Hol is to acknowledge the logic of power at work in the recruitment hub, and prioritize attention on the leadership cadres to give others a chance to renounce their affiliation and continued support to ISIS.

Third, most policy effort focuses resources on using security services to limit the opportunity for foreign fighters to mobilize (Byman, 2019). Although this approach may deny fighters some opportunities to reach the conflicts they are traveling to, it is hardly sufficient for addressing the complex threats recruitment hubs pose. While this dissertation concluded that political opportunities were a necessary precondition for hubs to form, not all political opportunities that allow foreign fighters to mobilize can be predicted, prevented, or proscribed. Furthermore, political opportunities are alone insufficient to describe where ISIS recruitment hubs formed, nor are they visible or avoidable. Opportunities formed in Tunisia as well as in Saudi Arabia, even though the

former transitioned to a democracy while the latter experienced virtually no change in government.

To head off future hubs, and potentially limit their outsized role on foreign fighter recruitment, policymakers should focus more attention on improving the livelihoods of people in the hubs identified in this dissertation. Hubs are socially, economically, and politically isolated areas with limited social hierarchy. People in Douar Hicher at first welcomed AST because it provided basic community protection that the state had failed to do. But, over time, the relationship soured as the group ultimately took more from the community than it provided. To avoid recruitment hubs in the future, governments should consider investing in the economic development and social integration of the regions at risk. Kabaria, for example, benefitted inadvertently from the development of the wealthy Mourouj suburb, so much so that residents' property values rose and the community stabilized. Similar efforts to improve conditions and stabilize local governance could flow from greater investment in basic infrastructure (e.g., educational and recreational resources, public transit, proper zoning) with the aim of boosting opportunities for formal employment and economic mobility. Finally, for these neighbourhoods, government jobs, not private-sector employment, are a vital pathway for upward mobility, a fact that should be considered in economic development policy before pursuit of headlong privatization across the region, which has drawbacks (Hibou, 2011).

This issue remains relevant because the structural factors that helped compel foreign fighters to join insurgencies in Syria and Iraq in the 2010s remain in place as of

this writing. Some having worsened in 2020-21, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated austerity measures (Sly, 2021). In the Middle East and North Africa region in particular, related structural factors include burgeoning youth populations, the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, anaemic economic growth prospects, struggling private sectors, and bloated bureaucracies. The pathways for economic mobility for youth are slim, and overall poverty has increased. The Middle East is the only region in the world where people have become poorer both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population over the past decade (Sly, 2021). Moreover, a recent tightening of authoritarian rule in the region (Brown et al., 2020), including in the name of counterterrorism (Rogers and Street, 2021), provides a political dimension that can result in increased protest and militancy (Piazza, 2017). The interconnected nature of foreign fighter recruitment hubs to a variety of other contentious political activity should also encourage policymakers to focus more on the local and interconnected dynamics of insurgent and foreign fighter recruitment, rather than split them apart as separate issues. As we have seen in this dissertation, all jihad is local – one cannot meaningfully or predictably separate local violence from more global conflict.



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APPENDIX

Appendix A – ISIS Foreign Fighters – Estimated Country Origins Worldwide

Country of Origin	Estimated ISIS Fighter Count	Country of Origin	Estimated ISIS Fighter Count
Afghanistan	50	Macedonia	140
Albania	90	Malaysia	91
Algeria	170	Maldives	200
Argentina	23	Montenegro	30
Australia	165	Morocco	1660
Austria	296	Netherlands	280
Azerbaijan	900	Norway	90
Bahrain	0	Oman	0
Belgium	528	Pakistan	650
Bosnia	248	Philippines	100
Bulgaria	10	Qatar	10
Canada	185	Russia	3417
China	1200	Saudi Arabia	3244
Denmark	145	Serbia	50
Egypt	600	Spain	204
Finland	80	Sudan	150
France	1910	Sweden	300
Georgia	200	Switzerland	70
Germany	915	Tajikistan	1300
India	75	Trinidad and Tobago	130
Indonesia	600	Tunisia	2926
Israel/Palestine	60	Turkey	1500
Italy	110	Turkmenistan	400
Jordan	3000	UAE	15
Kazakhstan	500	United Kingdom	850
Kosovo	317	USA	129
Kuwait	150	Uzbekistan	1500
Kyrgyzstan	500	Yemen	<i>Unknown</i>
Lebanon	900		
Libya	600		

(Source: Barrett, 2017)

Appendix B – Original ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Form

الإدارة العامة للحدود

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام

الإدارة العامة للحدود

بيانات مجاهد

لا إله إلا الله

الله رسول محمد

دولة الإسلام في العراق والشام

1	الإسم واللقب	
2	الكنية	
3	إسم الأم	
4	فصيلة الدم	
5	تاريخ الولادة و الجنسية	
6	الحالة الاجتماعية	أعزب (1) متزوج () عدد الأطفال ()
7	العنوان و مكان الإقامة	
8	التحصيل الدراسي	
9	المستوى الشرعي	طالب علم () متوسط () بسيط (1)
10	ماهي مهنتك قبل المجيء ؟	
11	البلدان التي سافرت إليها وكذا لبيت بها؟	
12	المنفذ الذي دخلت منه ؟ والواسطة ؟	تل ابيض
13	هل لديك تركية ومن من ؟	
14	تاريخ الدخول ؟	
15	هل سبق لك الجهاد ؟ وأين ؟	
16	مقاتل أم إستشهادي أم إنغماسي ؟	
17	الإختصاص ؟	مقاتل () شرعي () أميني () إداري ()
18	مكان العمل الحالي	
19	الأمانات التي تركتها ؟	جواز سفر
20	مستوى السمع والطاعة ؟	
21	العنوان الذي نتواصل معه ؟	
22	تاريخ القتل و المكان	
23	ملاحظات الانتماءات والحياة العامة والاعتقالات ومطلوب ام لا	

الإدارة العامة للحدود

الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام

شرفي

Appendix C – 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] Single, Married, Number of children
- *7. Address and place of residence
- *8. Education level
- *9. Level of shari'a expertise: [check boxes] Advanced Student, Intermediate, Basic
- *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] Fighter, Shari' [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

* - Considered for analysis in this dissertation

Appendix D – ISIS Foreign Fighters by Province in the Arabic-Speaking World

Appendix D.1 - Summary Statistics of Provinces

Country of Origin*	Total Number of Registered Fighters by Country	Total Number of Reg. Fighters with Subnational Data	Number of Total Provinces	Number of Provinces with 0 Fighters
Saudi Arabia	750	727	13	0
Tunisia	589	578	24	1
Morocco	243	233	12	3
Egypt	181	162	28	12
Libya	103	103	22	13
Jordan	46	46	12	8
Lebanon	28	28	8	5
Bahrain	27	27	4	2
Algeria	26	23	48	37
Yemen	26	21	21	12
Kuwait	25	25	6	2
Palestine	20	19	8	0
Qatar	9	6	8	5
Sudan	7	7	18	16
UAE	5	3	7	6
Oman	2	2	11	10
Mauritania	1	1	13	12
TOTAL	2011	2090	255	144

NOTE: ISIS fighters from Iraq and Syria are excluded as they are not considered "foreign" fighters..

NOTE: A complete list of fighters from each province in each country and the number of fighters is included below.

Appendix D.2 - Detailed Statistics for Each Province

No.	Country	Province Name	Number of Fighters	Province Population	Fighter Per Capita Rate	Fighter % (by country)
1	Algeria	Adrar	0	399714	0	0%
2	Algeria	Aïn Defla	1	766,013	0.1	4%
3	Algeria	Aïn Témouchent	0	371239	0	0%
4	Algeria	Algiers	12	2,988,145	0.4	46%
5	Algeria	Annaba	0	609499	0	0%
6	Algeria	Batna	0	1119791	0	0%
7	Algeria	Béchar	1	270,061	0.4	4%
8	Algeria	Béjaïa	0	912577	0	0%
9	Algeria	Biskra	0	721356	0	0%

10	Algeria	Blida	0	1002937	0	0%
11	Algeria	Bordj Bou Arréridj	0	628475	0	0%
12	Algeria	Bouïra	0	695583	0	0%
13	Algeria	Boumerdès	2	802,083	0.3	8%
14	Algeria	Chlef	0	1002088	0	0%
15	Algeria	Constantine	1	938,475	0.1	4%
16	Algeria	Djelfa	0	1092184	0	0%
17	Algeria	El Bayadh	0	228624	0	0%
18	Algeria	El Oued	0	647548	0	0%
19	Algeria	El Taref	0	408414	0	0%
20	Algeria	Ghardaïa	1	363,598	0.3	4%
21	Algeria	Guelma	0	482430	0	0%
22	Algeria	Illizi	0	52333	0	0%
23	Algeria	Jijel	0	636948	0	0%
24	Algeria	Khenchela	0	386683	0	0%
25	Algeria	Laghouat	0	455602	0	0%
26	Algeria	M'Sila	0	990591	0	0%
27	Algeria	Mascara	1	784,073	0.1	4%
28	Algeria	Médéa	0	819932	0	0%
29	Algeria	Mila	0	766886	0	0%
30	Algeria	Mostaganem	0	737118	0	0%
31	Algeria	Naâma	0	192891	0	0%
32	Algeria	Oran	2	1,454,078	0.1	8%
33	Algeria	Ouargla	0	558558	0	0%
34	Algeria	Oum el-Bouaghi	0	621612	0	0%
35	Algeria	Relizane	0	726180	0	0%
36	Algeria	Saïda	0	330641	0	0%
37	Algeria	Sétif	1	1,489,979	0.1	4%
38	Algeria	Sidi Bel Abbès	0	604744	0	0%
39	Algeria	Skikda	0	898680	0	0%
40	Algeria	Souk Ahras	0	438127	0	0%
41	Algeria	Tamanghasset	0	176637	0	0%
42	Algeria	Tébessa	0	648703	0	0%
43	Algeria	Tiaret	0	846823	0	0%
44	Algeria	Tindouf	0	49149	0	0%
45	Algeria	Tipaza	0	591010	0	0%
46	Algeria	Tissemsilt	0	294476	0	0%
47	Algeria	Tizi Ouzou	0	1127608	0	0%
48	Algeria	Tlemcen	1	949,135	0.1	4%

49	Bahrain	Capital	0	166465	0	0%
50	Bahrain	Muharraq	19	117884	18.9618	70%
51	Bahrain	No. Governorate	1	222608	1.2834	4%
52	Bahrain	So. Governorate	7	123787	16.1567854	26%
53	Egypt	Alexandria	25	4812186	0.51951442	14%
54	Egypt	Aswan	0	1431488	0	0%
55	Egypt	Asyut	0	4245215	0	0%
56	Egypt	Beheira	5	5804262	0.0861436	3%
57	Egypt	Beni Suef	0	2856812	0	0%
58	Egypt	Cairo	40	9278441	0.43110691	22%
59	Egypt	Dakahlia	22	5949001	0.36980999	12%
60	Egypt	Damietta	1	1330843	0.07514034	1%
61	Egypt	Faiyum	1	3170150	0.03154425	1%
62	Egypt	Gharbia	7	4751865	0.14731058	4%
63	Egypt	Giza	8	7585115	0.10546973	4%
64	Egypt	Ismailia	1	1178641	0.08484348	1%
65	Egypt	Kafr El Sheikh	6	3172753	0.18911021	3%
66	Egypt	Luxor	0	1147058	0	0%
67	Egypt	Matruh	2	447846	0.44658208	1%
68	Egypt	Minya	0	5156702	0	0%
69	Egypt	Monufia	0	3941293	0	0%
70	Egypt	New Valley	0	225416	0	0%
71	Egypt	North Sinai	9	434781	2.07000766	5%
72	Egypt	Port Said	5	666599	0.75007613	3%
73	Egypt	Qalyubia	9	5105972	0.17626419	5%
74	Egypt	Qena	0	3045504	0	0%
75	Egypt	Red Sea	0	345775	0	0%
76	Egypt	Sharqia	18	6485412	0.27754598	10%
77	Egypt	Sohag	0	4603861	0	0%
78	Egypt	South Sinai	0	167426	0	0%
79	Egypt	Suez	4	622859	0.64219992	2%
80	Palestine	Gaza	15	1700000	8.7353E-06	68%
81	Palestine	West Bank	4	2800000	0.14285714	18%
82	Jordan	Ajloun	0	146900	0	0%
83	Jordan	Amman	14	2473400	0.57173988	30%
84	Jordan	Aqaba	0	139200	0	0%
85	Jordan	Balqa	15	428000	3.54007363	33%
86	Jordan	Irbid	1	1137100	0.09257159	2%
87	Jordan	Jerash	0	191700	0	0%

88	Jordan	Karak	0	249100	0	0%
89	Jordan	Ma'an	0	121400	0	0%
90	Jordan	Madaba	0	159700	0	0%
91	Jordan	Mafrq	0	300300	0	0%
92	Jordan	Tafilah	3	89400	3.38960071	7%
93	Jordan	Zarqa	13	951800	1.37962945	28%
94	Kuwait	Ahmadi	6	286707	3.21958279	24%
95	Kuwait	Farwaniya	3	236433	1.95208986	12%
96	Kuwait	Hawalli	0	230759	0	0%
97	Kuwait	Jahra	9	185819	7.45141985	36%
98	Kuwait	Kuwait City	7	255540	4.21430335	28%
99	Kuwait	Mubarak al-Kabir	0	156451	0	0%
100	Lebanon	Akkar	0	389899	0	0%
101	Lebanon	Baalbek-Hermel	0	416427	0	0%
102	Lebanon	Beirut	2	432645	0.92454553	7%
103	Lebanon	Beqaa	3	536768	1.51054238	11%
104	Lebanon	Mount Lebanon	0	1831533	0	0%
105	Lebanon	Nabatieh	0	368077	0	0%
106	Lebanon	North	23	782436	5.54629726	82%
107	Lebanon	South	0	578195	0	0%
108	Libya	Al Wahat	2	177047	1.2	2%
109	Libya	Benghazi	47	670797	7.2	46%
110	Libya	Butnan	1	159536	0.6	1%
111	Libya	Derna	34	163351	21.5	33%
112	Libya	Ghat	0	23518	0	0%
113	Libya	Jabal al Akhdar	0	203156	0	0%
114	Libya	Jabal al Gharbi	0	304159	0	0%
115	Libya	Jafara	0	453198	0	0%
116	Libya	Jufra	0	52342	0	0%
117	Libya	Kufra	0	50104	0	0%
118	Libya	Marj	1	185848	0.6	1%
119	Libya	Misrata	3	550938	0.6	0%
120	Libya	Murqub	0	432202	0	0%
121	Libya	Murzuq	0	78621	0	0%
122	Libya	Nalut	0	93224	0	0%
123	Libya	Nuqat al Khams	0	287662	0	0%
124	Libya	Sabha	0	134162	0	0%
125	Libya	Sirte	7	193720	3.7	0%
126	Libya	Tripoli	6	1065405	0.6	0%

127	Libya	Wadi al Hayaa	0	76858	0	0%
128	Libya	Wadi al Shatii	0	78532	0	0%
129	Libya	Zawiya	2	290993	0.7	0%
130	Morocco	Béni Mellal-Khénifra	24	2520776	1	10%
131	Morocco	Casablanca-Settat	25	6861739	0.4	10%
132	Morocco	Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab	0	142,955	0	0%
133	Morocco	Drâa-Tafilalet	0	1,635,008	0	0%
134	Morocco	Fès-Meknès	50	4236892	1.2	21%
135	Morocco	Guelmim-Oued Noun	0	433,757	0	0%
136	Morocco	L'oriental	7	2314346	0.3	3%
137	Morocco	Laâyoune-Sakia al Hamra	1	367758	0.3	0%
138	Morocco	Marrakech-Safi	17	4520569	0.4	7%
139	Morocco	Rabat-Salé-Kénitra	17	4580866	0.4	7%
140	Morocco	Souss-Massa	6	2676847	0.2	2%
141	Morocco	Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceima	85	3556729	2.4	35%
142	Oman	Ad Dakhiliyah	0	326651	0	0%
143	Oman	Ad Dhahirah	0	151664	0	0%
144	Oman	Al Batinah North	2	483582	0.9	100%
145	Oman	Al Batinah South	0	289008	0	0%
146	Oman	Al Buraymi	0	72917	0	0%
147	Oman	Al Wusta	0	42389	0	0%
148	Oman	Ash Sharqiyah North	0	162482	0	0%
149	Oman	Ash Sharqiyah South	0	188032	0	0%
150	Oman	Dhofar	0	249729	0	0%
151	Oman	Musandam	0	31425	0	0%
152	Oman	Muscat	0	775878	0	0%
153	Qatar	Al Daayen	0	6521	0	0%
154	Qatar	Al Khor	0	24244	0	0%
155	Qatar	Al Wakrah	0	35884	0	0%
156	Qatar	Doha	1	114775	1	11%
157	Qatar	Madinat ash Shamal	0	1055	0	0%
158	Qatar	Rayyan	5	72685	7.6	56%
159	Qatar	Umm Salal	0	10900	0	0%
160	Saudi Arabia	Asir	21	1719950	1.23329871	3%
161	Saudi Arabia	Bahah	11	376204	2.95348032	1%
162	Saudi Arabia	Eastern Region	67	3087687	2.89321208	9%
163	Saudi Arabia	Hail	31	529012	5.91917221	4%
164	Saudi Arabia	Jizan	6	1187284	0.51045968	1%

165	Saudi Arabia	Jouf	8	373662	2.16259831	1%
166	Saudi Arabia	Mecca	126	4440571	2.86613427	17%
167	Saudi Arabia	Medina	26	1353102	1.94091992	3%
168	Saudi Arabia	Najran	6	430711	1.54782828	1%
169	Saudi Arabia	Northern Borders	6	285486	2.12290832	1%
170	Saudi Arabia	Qassim	135	991032	13.7597612	18%
171	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	252	4579570	5.55828286	34%
172	Saudi Arabia	Tabouk	32	710699	4.54809031	4%
173	Tunisia	Ariana	41	576088	7.2	7%
174	Tunisia	Béja	4	303032	1.3	1%
175	Tunisia	Ben Arous	17	631842	2.7	3%
176	Tunisia	Bizerte	58	568219	10.3	10%
177	Tunisia	Gabès	13	374300	3.5	2%
178	Tunisia	Gafsa	11	337331	3.3	2%
179	Tunisia	Jendouba	4	401477	1	1%
180	Tunisia	Kairouan	28	570559	5	5%
181	Tunisia	Kasserine	25	439243	5.7	4%
182	Tunisia	Kebili	27	156961	17.4	5%
183	Tunisia	Kef	3	243156	1.2	1%
184	Tunisia	Mahdia	8	410812	2	1%
185	Tunisia	Manouba	17	379518	4.5	3%
186	Tunisia	Medenine	29	479520	6.1	5%
187	Tunisia	Monastir	34	548828	6.3	6%
188	Tunisia	Nabeul	27	787920	3.5	5%
189	Tunisia	Sfax	5	955421	0.5	1%
190	Tunisia	Sidi Bouzid	35	429912	8.2	6%
191	Tunisia	Siliana	6	223087	2.7	1%
192	Tunisia	Sousse	39	674971	5.8	7%
193	Tunisia	Tataouine	10	149453	6.8	2%
194	Tunisia	Tozeur	0	107912	0	0%
195	Tunisia	Tunis	136	1056247	13	23%
196	Tunisia	Zaghuan	1	176945	0.6	0%
197	UAE	Abu Dhabi	0	350,277	0	0%
198	UAE	Ajman	0	39,231	0	0%
199	UAE	Dubai	0	137,573	0	0%
200	UAE	Fujairah	0	56,421	0	0%
201	UAE	Ras al-Khaimah	0	87,848	0	0%
202	UAE	Sharjah	3	138,272	2.71204582	60%
203	UAE	Umm al-Quwain	0	15,873	0	0%

204	Yemen	Abyan	2	608000	0.33227007	8%
205	Yemen	Aden	4	826000	0.48915303	15%
206	Yemen	Al Bayda	0	809000	0	0%
207	Yemen	Al Jawf	0	622000	0	0%
208	Yemen	Al Mahrah	0	124000	0	0%
209	Yemen	Al Mahwit	0	693000	0	0%
210	Yemen	Amanat Al Asimah	0	2449000	0	0%
211	Yemen	Amran	0	1230000	0	0%
212	Yemen	Dhale	0	659000	0	0%
213	Yemen	Dhamar	0	1864000	0	0%
214	Yemen	Hadramawt	1	1441000	0.07009722	4%
215	Yemen	Hajjah	0	2073000	0	0%
216	Yemen	Hudaydah	3	3023000	0.11675196	12%
217	Yemen	Ibb	1	2987000	0.06695681	4%
218	Yemen	Lahij	1	1013000	0.09971382	4%
219	Yemen	Marib	3	334000	1.79640719	12%
220	Yemen	Raymah	0	553000	0	0%
221	Yemen	Sa'dah	0	974000	0	0%
222	Yemen	Sana'a	5	1288000	1.55279503	19%
223	Yemen	Shabwa	1	659000	0.15327785	4%
224	Yemen	Taiz	0	3354000	0	0%
225	Mauritania	Adrar	0	62658	0	0%
226	Mauritania	Assaba	0	325897	0	0%
227	Mauritania	Brakna	0	312277	0	0%
228	Mauritania	Dakhlet Nouadhibou	0	123779	0	0%
229	Mauritania	Gorgol	0	335917	0	0%
230	Mauritania	Guidimaka	0	267029	0	0%
231	Mauritania	Hodh Ech Chargui	0	430668	0	0%
232	Mauritania	Hodh El Gharbi	0	294108	0	0%
233	Mauritania	Inchiri	0	19639	0	0%
234	Mauritania	Nouakchott	1	958399	0.10539462	100%
235	Mauritania	Tagant	0	80962	0	0%
236	Mauritania	Tiris Zemmour	0	53261	0	0%
237	Mauritania	Trarza	0	272773	0	0%
238	Sudan	Al Jazirah	1	4582000	0.02249952	14%
239	Sudan	Al Qadarif	0	1748000	0	0%
240	Sudan	Blue Nile	0	1103000	0	0%
241	Sudan	Kassala	0	2090000	0	0%
242	Sudan	Khartoum	6	6932000	0.08923207	86%

243	Sudan	Nile River	0	1386000	0	0%
244	Sudan	North Darfur	0	2695000	0	0%
245	Sudan	North Kurdufan	0	2638000	0	0%
246	Sudan	Northern	0	924000	0	0%
247	Sudan	Red Sea	0	1757000	0	0%
248	Sudan	Sennar	0	1638000	0	0%
249	Sudan	South Darfur	0	3583000	0	0%
250	Sudan	South Kurdufan	0	1137000	0	0%
251	Sudan	West Kurdufan	0	1649000	0	0%
252	Sudan	White Nile	0	2194000	0	0%
253	Sudan	Central Darfur	0	721000	0	0%
254	Sudan	East Darfur	0	1532000	0	0%
255	Sudan	West Darfur	0	972000	0	0%

Appendix E – Definition of Variables Collected

Variable	Definition	Rationale for Inclusion
Fighters	Total number of ISIS fighters registered by province in the leaked document	Total number of ISIS foreign fighters from the registration files
Fighters Per Capita	Number of ISIS fighters recruited in each province indexed to 100,000 Sunni Muslim Local National Residents	To assess the distribution of hubs in the provinces of the Arabic-speaking region.
Hub	Was the province a hub? (1=yes; 0=no)	As the outcome variable for testing characteristics of hubs (in Ch. 4)
Bordering Syria	Did the country border Syria (1=yes; 0=no)	To eliminate possible bias from fighters coming from Jordan and Lebanon
Land or Sea Border	Did the province have either a land or sea border with another country (1=yes; 0=no)	Provinces bordering other countries might have more access to informal markets (i.e., smuggling)
Political Transformation	Did the country undergo a political transition during the Arab spring? (1=yes; 0=no)	Did the 2011 Arab Spring political transformations affect the likelihood of mobilization?
Tunisia	Dummy variable for Tunisia (1=yes; 0=no)	Eliminates the possibility that any finding comes from Tunisia having a large number of total hubs (18 in 45)
Saudi Arabia	Dummy variable to Saudi Arabia (1=yes; 0=no)	Eliminates the possibility that any finding comes from Saudi having a large number of total hubs (10 in 45)
Distance to Syria	Log Distance in kilometers from provincial capital to Raqqa, Syria	Tests the extent to which distance from Syria affects the results
Provincial Population	Population of the province (as close as possible to 2013)	Uses the log of province population as a control variable
Population Growth Rate	Annualized percentage population growth rate calculated during two periods with the second being as close as possible to 2013	To determine whether the rapidity of a population's growth affects their chances at being a source of recruits (e.g., as argued by Huntington, 1968)
Youth Population % 15-29	Proportion of total population aged 15-29	To determine whether youth bulges lead to higher rates of foreign fighters (e.g., Urdal, 2006)
Educational Attainment Rate	Level of university attendance (BA or above)	To determine whether secondary school graduation rates affects the likelihood of foreign fighter recruitment (World Bank, 2018)

Monthly Household Expenditure (2013 USD)	Amount spent by household by province month indexed to 2013 USD	To determine whether there is a correlation between incomes and participation (e.g., Krueger, 2008; Abadie, 2006; Benmelech and Klor, 2018)
Youth Unemployment 20-24	Proportion of the unemployed population who are aged 20-24	To determine whether youth unemployment leads to higher rates of foreign fighters (Abdel Jelil et al., 2018)
Youth Unemployment 25-29	Proportion of the unemployed population who are aged 25-29	To determine whether youth unemployment leads to higher rates of foreign fighters (Abdel Jelil et al., 2018)
University Graduate Unemployment	Proportion of the unemployed population who have a university degree	To determine whether youth unemployment leads to higher rates of foreign fighters (Abdel Jelil et al., 2018)
Internet Penetration Rate	Percent of Households with Internet Access	To determine the extent to which regions had access to a crucial service (e.g., Stewart, 2008)
Percent Urban Population	Proportion of provincial population living in urban areas	To determine the extent to which foreign fighter recruitment is in cities
Female Economic Activity Rate	Proportion of women who are in the labour force	To determine the extent to which female economic empowerment inhibits or facilitates recruitment

Appendix F – Data Presence for Subnational Data and Country

Vars	AL	BA	EG	JO	KU	LE	LI	MA	MO	OM	PA	QA	SA	SU	TU	AE	YE
Fighters	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fighters Per 100,000 Res.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hub	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bordering Syria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distance to Syria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provincial Population	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Population Growth Rate	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Youth Pop. 15-29	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	/	X	X	X	X	X		X	*	X
Educational Attainment	X	X	X	X	X	*		X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Monthly HH. Expendit.	*	X	/	X	*	/	*	*	X	/	X	*	X	*	X	*	X
Unemp. Aged 20-24	*	X	X	X	X	*	X		X	X	X	*	X		X	X	X
Unemp. Aged 25-29	*	X	X	X	X	*	X		X		X	*	X		X	X	X
Higher Ed. + Unemployed	*	X	X	*		*	X		X		X	*	X		X		X
Internet Pen. Rate	*	*	X	*	X	*	*	*	X	*	X	*	X	*	X	*	*
Percent Urban Pop.	X	X	X	X	*	*	X	*	X	*	*	*	X	X	X	X	X
Female Econ Activity Rate	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	/	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
NOTE: "X" signifies full data; "/" signifies partial data; " " signifies missing data; * signifies national-level data																	

Note on abbreviations:

AL = Algeria; BA = Bahrain; EG = Egypt; JO = Jordan; KU = Kuwait; LE = Lebanon;
LI = Libya; MA = Mauritania; MO = Morocco; OM = Oman; PA = Palestine;
QA = Qatar; SA = Saudi Arabia; SU = Sudan; TU = Tunisia;
AE = United Arab Emirates; YE = Yemen

Appendix G – Sources of Subnationally Representative Census Data by Country

Variable	Saudi Arabia	Tunisia	Morocco	Egypt
Fighters	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms
Fighters Per 100,000 Residents ("Residents" = Local National Sunni Muslim)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)
Hub	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms
Provincial Population	2013 Household Expenditure Survey	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Population Growth Rate	2007 and 2013 Household Expenditure Survey	2014 National Census (which included 2004 growth rates)	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2004 and 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Youth Population % 15-29	2010 National Census	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Educational Attainment Rate	2010 National Census	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Monthly HH Expenditure (2013 USD)	2013 Household Expenditure Survey	2015 Household Consumption Survey	National Household Consumption and Expenditure Survey 2013-2014	Hlasny and Paolo Verme, 2015

Youth Unemployment 20-24	Labor Force Survey, 2nd Half of 2014	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Youth Unemployment 25-29	Labor Force Survey, 2nd Half of 2014	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Higher Ed + Unemployment	Labor Force Survey, 2nd Half of 2014	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Internet Penetration Rate	2017 Internet Communications Technology Survey	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017
Percent Urban Population	Al-Jabri, 2008	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt in Figures 2015
Female Economic Activity Rate	Labor Force Survey, 2nd Half of 2014	2014 National Census	Morocco Population and Housing Census 2014	Egypt Population and Housing Census 2017

Variable	Libya	Jordan	Lebanon	Bahrain
Fighters	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms
Fighters Per 100,000 Residents ("Residents" = Local National Sunni Muslim)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)
Hub	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms

Provincial Population	National Survey of Libya 2012	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19	National Population Projections 2013, Bahrain Data Portal
Population Growth Rate	National Survey of Libya 2012; http://www.citypopulation.de/Libya.html	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015; 2004	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19; Population Survey 2004	National Population Projections 2012-2016, Bahrain Data Portal
Youth Population % 15-29	National Survey of Libya 2012	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Lebanon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009	Population, Housing, Buildings, Establishments and Agriculture Census 2010
Educational Attainment Rate	<i>Not Available</i>	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19	Population, Housing, Buildings, Establishments and Agriculture Census 2010
Monthly HH Expenditure (2013 USD)	African Development Bank - A Comparison of Real Household Consumption Expenditures and Price Levels in Africa (2012)	Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2013	Household Expenditure Survey 2012	Household Expenditure and Income Survey 2014-15
Youth Unemployment 20-24	Employment and Unemployment Survey of 2013; National Survey of Libya 2012	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19	Population, Housing, Buildings, Establishments and Agriculture Census 2010
Youth Unemployment 25-29	Labor Market Dynamics of Libya 2015	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19	Population, Housing, Buildings, Establishments and Agriculture Census 2010
Higher Ed + Unemployment	Labor Market Dynamics of Libya 2015	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19	Population, Housing, Buildings, Establishments and Agriculture Census 2010
Internet Penetration Rate	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	Population and Health Survey, 2017	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)
Percent Urban Population	National Survey of Libya 2012	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	World Bank - Rural Population % of Total - Lebanon 2013	World Bank - Rural Population % of Total - Bahrain 2013

Female Economic Activity Rate	Labor Market Dynamics of Libya 2015	Jordan Population and Housing Census 2015	Labour Force and Household Living Conditions Survey from 2018-19	Population, Housing, Buildings, Establishments and Agriculture Census 2010
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Variable	Algeria	Yemen	Kuwait	Palestine
Fighters	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms
Fighters Per 100,000 Residents ("Residents" = Local National Sunni Muslim	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)
Hub	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms
Distance to Syria	DistanceCalculator. Net	DistanceCalculator. Net	DistanceCalculator. Net	DistanceCalculator. Net
Provincial Population	Algeria Population and Housing Census 2008	Yemen 2004 General Census	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics - Population Statistics - 2014
Population Growth Rate	Algeria Population and Housing Census 1998 and 2008	Yemen 2004 General Census; 2013 Statistical Yearbook	General Housing Census 2005; General Housing Census 1995	Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics - Population Statistics - 2013 & 2003
Youth Population % 15-29	Algeria Population and Housing Census 2008	Yemen 2004 General Census	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics - Population Statistics - 2014
Educational Attainment Rate	Algeria Population and Housing Census 2008	Yemen Household Survey 2005-2006	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics - Education Statistics - 2013
Monthly HH Expenditure (2013 USD)	Algeria Population and Housing Census 2008	Yemen Household Survey 2005-2006	Income and Family Expenditure Survey 2013	Palestine Living Standards Survey, 2017

Youth Unemployment 20-24	Economic Activity, Employment and Unemployment in Algeria - 4th Quarter 2013	Yemen Labor Force Survey 2003-04	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Labour Force Survey - 2014
Youth Unemployment 25-29	Economic Activity, Employment and Unemployment in Algeria - 4th Quarter 2013	Yemen Labor Force Survey 2003-04	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Labour Force Survey - 2014
Higher Ed + Unemployment	Economic Activity, Employment and Unemployment in Algeria - 4th Quarter 2013	Yemen Labor Force Survey 2003-04	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Labour Force Survey - 2014
Internet Penetration Rate	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	2011 Housing Census	Access And Use To ICT By Households & Individual - 2014
Percent Urban Population	Algeria Population and Housing Census 2008	Yemen 2004 General Census	World Bank - Rural Population % of Total - Kuwait 2013	World Bank - Rural Population % of Total - Palestine 2013
Female Economic Activity Rate	Algeria Population and Housing Census 2008	Yemen Labor Force Survey 2003-04	General Housing Census 2005	Palestine Labour Force Survey - 2014

Variable	Qatar	Sudan	UAE	Oman	Mauritania
Fighters	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms
Fighters Per 100,000 Residents ("Residents" = Local National Sunni Muslim	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms, Subnational Population Statistics, Pew Research Center's Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)
Hub	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms	ISIS Foreign Fighter Registration Forms

Provincial Population	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	Sudan Population Data Sheet 2018	UAE National Census 2005	Omani Population 2013 (data.gov.om)	General Census of Population and Housing 2013
Population Growth Rate	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010 & 2015	Sudan Population Data Sheet 2018	UAE National Census 2005 and 1995	Omani Population 2013 & 2010 (data.gov.om)	General Census of Population and Housing 2013
Youth Population % 15-29	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	<i>Not Available</i>	UAE National Census 2005	Omani Population 2013 (data.gov.om)	General Census of Population and Housing 2013
Educational Attainment Rate	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	<i>Not Available</i>	UAE National Census 2005	<i>Not Available</i>	General Census of Population and Housing 2013
Monthly HH Expenditure (2013 USD)	Measuring the Standard of Living in Qatar 2012-13	African Development Bank - A Comparison of Real Household Consumption Expenditures and Price Levels in Africa (2012)	2008 UAE Household Expenditure Survey	Household Expenditure and Income Survey in Oman 2011	African Development Bank - A Comparison of Real Household Consumption Expenditures and Price Levels in Africa (2012)
Youth Unemployment 20-24	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	<i>Not Available</i>	UAE National Census 2005	Labor Market Survey - 2016 (data.gov.om)	<i>Not Available</i>
Youth Unemployment 25-29	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	<i>Not Available</i>	UAE National Census 2005	<i>Not Available</i>	<i>Not Available</i>
Higher Ed + Unemployment	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	<i>Not Available</i>	UAE National Census 2005	<i>Not Available</i>	<i>Not Available</i>
Internet Penetration Rate	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)	Oman Household Survey 2015-16	Internetlivestats.com (national level figure)
Percent Urban Population	World Bank - Rural Population	Sudan Population Data Sheet 2018	UAE National Census 2005	Household Expenditure and	World Bank - Rural Population

	% of Total - Qatar 2013			Income Survey in Oman 2011	% of Total - Mauritania 2013
Female Economic Activity Rate	The General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment 2010	<i>Not Available</i>	UAE National Census 2005	Labor Market Survey - 2016 (data.gov.om)	General Census of Population and Housing 2013

Appendix H – Sensitivity Analysis for Chapter 4 Section 4.2

Hubs as defined in this dissertation are twice the expected rate of recruitment per province. This sensitivity analysis tests whether the results in Tables 4.6-4.12 of Chapter 4 change if we loosen the definition of hubs to 1.5 times (“Loose”) or restrict it to 3 times (“Restricted”) the expected rate of recruitment (normally 2 times the expected rate).

1. Appendix H.1 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.6.
2. Appendix H.2 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.7.
3. Appendix H.3 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.8.
4. Appendix H.4 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.9.
5. Appendix H.5 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.10.
6. Appendix H.6 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.11.
7. Appendix H.7 – Hub Loose Definition – Table 4.12.
8. Appendix H.8 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.6.
9. Appendix H.9 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.7.
10. Appendix H.10 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.8.
11. Appendix H.11 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.9.
12. Appendix H.12 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.10.
13. Appendix H.13 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.11.
14. Appendix H.14 – Hub Restricted Definition – Table 4.12.

Appendix H.1 Loose Definition Table 4.6 – Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province

<i>Dependent variable: fighter under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Proportion of province aged 15-29 years old	1.63* (0.66)	1.51* (0.65)	2.42 (1.75)
Hub Loose (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.20*** (0.03)	0.48 (0.50)
Youth x Hub Interaction term			-1.05 (1.88)
Constant	0.27 (0.18)	0.14 (0.18)	-0.10 (0.47)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.45		
Adjusted R²	0.004	0.03	0.03
F Statistic	6.14**	24.76***	16.60***

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.2 Loose Definition Table 4.7 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter graduated from university (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Education Proportion of university graduation rates per province	0.79*** (0.15)	0.86*** (0.15)	1.16*** (0.28)
Hub Loose (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.05+ (0.03)	0.01 (0.06)
Education x Hub Interaction term			-0.43 (0.33)
Constant	0.05+ (0.03)	0.08** (0.03)	0.04 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.39		
Adjusted R²	0.02	0.02	0.02
F Statistic	29.53***	16.46***	11.52***

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.3 Loose Definition Table 4.8 Socioeconomic Status of Fighters and Wealth of Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: Fighter socioeconomic score*</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Monthly Household Expenditures			
Log household expenditures per province (2013 USD)	0.37** (0.12)	0.73*** (0.14)	-1.65*** (0.35)
Hub Loose (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-1.09*** (0.25)	-21.42*** (2.72)
Household Expenditure x Hub Interaction term			2.85*** (0.38)
Constant	8.36*** (0.93)	6.46*** (1.02)	23.06*** (2.43)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	3.01	2.99	2.92
Adjusted R²	0.01	0.02	0.06
F Statistic	9.84***	14.58***	28.91***

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

*Fighter socioeconomic score combines profession, education, travel, and marital status. For more, see Ch. 3.

Appendix H.4 Loose Definition Table 4.9 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter unemployed (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Unemployment			
Unemployment rate by province	0.07 (0.19)	0.18 (0.19)	0.75* (0.30)
Hub Loose (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.06* (0.02)	0.20** (0.06)
Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.94* (0.39)
Constant	0.11*** (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.33		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.003	0.01
F Statistic	0.14	2.96+	3.33*

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.5 Loose Definition Table 4.10 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighters unemployed aged under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.10 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.11)	0.59** (0.24)
Hub Loose (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.08*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.06)
Youth Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.76*** (0.27)
Constant	0.08*** (0.03)	0.05+ (0.03)	-0.06 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.31		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.01	0.01
F Statistic	1.02	7.06***	7.42***

*Note: + p < 0.1 * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001 (two-tailed).*

Appendix H.6 Loose Definition Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge – Per Capita FF Recruitment Rates Per Province

Dependent variable: Loose hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		0.13			
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		(0.08)			
Youth		-0.03***			
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		(0.01)			
Internet Access		0.01***			
Internet penetration rates per province		(0.002)			
Women in Workforce			0.01***		
Proportion of women in the labour force			(0.003)		
Urban Population			0.001		
Proportion of population living in urban areas			(0.001)		
Population Growth			-0.02**		
Annualized population growth over two periods			(0.01)		
Youth Unemployment				0.003	
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				(0.004)	
Higher Ed. Unemp.				0.02***	
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				(0.003)	
Monthly HH Expend.					0.22***
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					(0.04)
GDP Per Capita					-0.001
Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					(0.04)
Distance to Syria	-0.07	0.13**	-0.08	-0.05	-0.10**
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Province Population	-0.02	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.06*
Log of population per province	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	1.07**	-0.53	-0.03	0.39	-1.32**
	(0.46)	(0.71)	(0.60)	(0.41)	(0.64)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Adjusted R²	0.01	0.17	0.11	0.26	0.18
Residual SE	0.42	0.39	0.40	0.37	0.39
F Statistic	1.68	9.20***	6.05***	18.64***	12.21***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.7 Loose Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Per Capita FF Recruitment Rates Per Province

Dependent variable: Loose hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.16*** (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)		0.16*** (0.06)
Youth Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)		-0.02*** (0.01)
Internet Access Internet penetration rates per province	0.01*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.002)		0.005*** (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp. Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.02*** (0.002)		0.01*** (0.003)	0.01*** (0.003)
Monthly HH Expend. Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.13*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)
Population Growth Annualized population growth over two periods		-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)
Distance to Syria Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	0.04 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.11 (0.04)	-0.004 (0.05)
Province Population Log of population per province	0.02 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)
Constant	-0.20 (0.55)	-0.62 (0.62)	-0.52 (0.52)	-0.53 (0.58)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Adjusted R²	0.35	0.30	0.33	0.38
Residual SE	0.33	0.35	0.34	0.32
F Statistic	20.80***	14.64***	22.37***	18.07***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.8 Restricted Definition Table 4.6 – Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province

<i>Dependent variable: fighter under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Proportion of province aged 15-29 years old	1.63* (0.66)	1.51* (0.65)	2.42 (1.75)
Hub Restricted (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.20*** (0.03)	0.48 (0.50)
Youth x Hub Interaction term			-1.05 (1.88)
Constant	0.27 (0.18)	0.14 (0.18)	-0.10 (0.47)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.45		
Adjusted R²	0.004	0.04	0.03
F Statistic	6.14**	24.76***	16.60***

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.9 Restricted Definition Table 4.7 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter graduated from university (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Education Proportion of university graduation rates per province	0.79*** (0.15)	0.86*** (0.15)	1.16*** (0.28)
Hub Restricted (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.05+ (0.03)	0.01 (0.06)
Education x Hub Interaction term			-0.43 (0.33)
Constant	0.05+ (0.03)	0.08** (0.03)	0.04 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.39		
Adjusted R²	0.02	0.02	0.03
F Statistic	29.53***	16.46***	11.52***

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.10 Restricted Definition Table 4.8 Socioeconomic Status of Fighters and Wealth of Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: Fighter socioeconomic score*</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Monthly Household Expenditures			
Log household expenditures per province (2013 USD)	0.37** (0.12)	0.73*** (0.14)	-1.65*** (0.35)
Hub Restricted (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-1.09*** (0.25)	-21.42*** (2.72)
Household Expenditure x Hub Interaction term			2.85*** (0.38)
Constant	8.36*** (0.93)	6.46*** (1.02)	23.06*** (2.43)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	3.01	2.99	2.92
Adjusted R²	0.01	0.02	0.06
F Statistic	9.84***	14.58***	28.91***

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

*Fighter socioeconomic score combines profession, education, travel, and marital status. For more, see Ch. 3.

Appendix H.11 Restricted Definition Table 4.9 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter unemployed (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Unemployment			
Unemployment rate by province	0.07 (0.19)	0.18 (0.19)	0.75* (0.30)
Hub Restricted (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.06* (0.02)	0.20** (0.06)
Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.94* (0.39)
Constant	0.11*** (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.33		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.003	0.01
F Statistic	0.14	3.18*	4.06**

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.12 Restricted Definition Table 4.10 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighters unemployed aged under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.10 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.11)	0.59 ⁺ (0.24)
Hub Restricted (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.08*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.06)
Youth Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.76*** (0.27)
Constant	0.08*** (0.03)	0.05 ⁺ (0.03)	-0.06 (0.05)
Observations	1293		
Residual Standard Error	0.31		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.01	0.01
F Statistic	1.02	7.06***	7.42***

Note: ⁺ $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.13 Restricted Definition Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge – Per Capita FF Recruitment Rates Per Province

	Dependent variable: <i>restricted</i> hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.13* (0.07)			
Youth Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		-0.03*** (0.01)			
Internet Access Internet penetration rates per province		0.01*** (0.002)			
Women in Workforce Proportion of women in the labour force			0.01*** (0.003)		
Urban Population Proportion of population living in urban areas			0.001 (0.001)		
Population Growth Annualized population growth over two periods			-0.01 (0.01)		
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				0.004 (0.004)	
Higher Ed. Unemp. Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				0.0*** (0.003)	
Monthly HH Expend. Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					0.18*** (0.04)
GDP Per Capita Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					-0.03 (0.04)
Distance to Syria Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	-0.03 (0.04)	0.12** (0.05)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)
Province Population Log of population per province	-0.03 (0.02)	0.005 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	0.73* (0.42)	-0.27 (0.66)	-0.38 (0.54)	0.20 (0.38)	-0.88 (0.60)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Adjusted R²	0.01	0.14	0.12	0.21	0.13
Residual SE	0.38	0.36	0.36	0.34	0.36
F Statistic	1.03	6.68***	5.60***	13.07***	7.56***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix H.14 Restricted Definition Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Per Capita FF Recruitment Rates Per Province

Dependent variable: <i>Restricted</i> hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.17*** (0.05)	0.14** (0.06)		0.17*** (0.06)
Youth				
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)		-0.02*** (0.01)
Internet Access				
Internet penetration rates per province	0.004*** (0.002)	0.004*** (0.002)		0.004*** (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp.				
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.01*** (0.002)		0.01*** (0.002)	0.01*** (0.002)
Monthly HH Expend.				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.10*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Population Growth				
Annualized population growth over two periods		-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Distance to Syria				
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	0.05 (0.04)	0.004 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)
Province Population				
Log of population per province	0.003 (0.02)	0.03* (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Constant	-0.20 (0.52)	-0.50 (0.58)	-0.45 (0.50)	-0.42 (0.56)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Adjusted R²	0.27	0.22	0.23	0.29
Residual SE	0.32	0.33	0.34	0.31
F Statistic	14.72***	9.83***	13.91***	12.21***

*Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1 (two-tailed).*

Appendix I – Robustness Checks for Tables 4.11-12

This section includes robustness checks for the definition of ‘hubs,’ using results from Tables 4.11 and 4.12 in Chapter 4. The following robustness checks are included in this Appendix.

1. Appendix I.1 - Tests of table 4.11 results using logit rather than linear regression.
2. Appendix I.2 - Tests of table 4.12 results using logit rather than linear regression.
3. Appendix I.3 - Tests of table 4.11 results using per capita rates of ISIS foreign fighters per province, rather than the presence/absence of hubs, as the outcome variable of interest.
4. Appendix I.4 - Tests of table 4.12 results using per capita rates of ISIS foreign fighters per province, rather than the presence/absence of hubs, as the outcome variable of interest.
5. Appendix I.5 - Controlling for the influence of hubs in Saudi Arabia on table 4.11 results.
6. Appendix I.6 - Controlling for the influence of hubs in Saudi Arabia on table 4.12 results.
7. Appendix I.7 - Controlling for the influence of hubs in Tunisia on table 4.11 results.
8. Appendix I.8 - Controlling for the influence of hubs in Tunisia on table 4.12 results.
9. Appendix I.9 - Controlling for the influence of countries bordering Syria on table 4.11 results.
10. Appendix I.10 - Controlling for the influence of countries bordering Syria on table 4.12 results.

**Appendix I.1 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge –
Per Capita FF Recruitment Rates Per Province**

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations					
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.77* (0.38)			
Youth					
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		-0.26*** (0.06)			
Internet Access					
Internet penetration rates per province		0.03*** (0.01)			
Women in Workforce					
Proportion of women in the labour force			0.06*** (0.02)		
Urban Population					
Proportion of population living in urban areas			0.01 (0.01)		
Population Growth					
Annualized population growth over two periods			-0.14*** (0.05)		-0.20*** (0.05)
Youth Unemployment					
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				0.01 (0.02)	
Higher Ed. Unemp.					
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				0.05*** (0.01)	
Monthly HH Expend.					
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					1.61*** (0.23)
GDP Per Capita					
Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					-0.65*** (0.17)
Distance to Syria					
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	-0.12 (0.22)	0.20 (0.26)	-0.35 (0.22)	-0.27 (0.21)	-0.88*** (0.24)
Province Population					
Log of population per province	-0.28*** (0.10)	-0.11 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.40*** (0.11)	-0.005 (0.11)
Constant					
	4.92** (2.17)	5.90* (3.49)	1.86 (2.75)	6.45*** (2.11)	1.00 (3.02)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Log Likelihood	-303.58	-282.61	-287.56	-293.08	-271.77
AIC	613.16	577.23	587.13	596.16	555.53

*Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1 (two-tailed).*

Appendix I.2 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Per Capita FF Recruitment Rates Per Province

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		1.26*** (0.37)	1.06*** (0.34)	1.20*** (0.37)
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				
Youth		0.21*** (0.05)	-0.24*** (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.05)
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29				
Internet Access		0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Internet penetration rates per province				
Higher Ed. Unemp.	1.04*** (0.17)	0.86*** (0.18)		0.77*** (0.19)
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				
Monthly HH Expend.	-0.20*** (0.05)	-0.25*** (0.05)		-0.23*** (0.05)
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				
Population Growth	0.03*** (0.01)		0.04*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Annualized population growth over two periods				
Distance to Syria	-0.76*** (0.23)	-0.59** (0.28)	-0.19 (0.25)	-0.57** (0.28)
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria				
Province Population	0.02 (0.11)	0.21** (0.11)	-0.11 (0.10)	0.15 (0.11)
Log of population per province				
Constant	2.43 (2.91)	0.21 (3.32)	7.41** (3.16)	1.01 (3.31)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Log Likelihood	-278.44	-261.05	-279.81	-259.28
AIC	568.89	538.10	573.62	536.57

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

**Appendix I.3 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge –
Logit Regression**

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		1.04* (0.55)			
Youth Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		-0.20** (0.08)			
Internet Access Internet penetration rates per province		0.04*** (0.01)			
Women in Workforce Proportion of women in the labour force			0.07*** (0.02)		
Urban Population Proportion of population living in urban areas			0.002 (0.01)		
Population Growth Annualized population growth over two periods			-0.14* (0.08)		-0.20*** (0.08)
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				0.02 (0.03)	
Higher Ed. Unemp. Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				0.11*** (0.02)	
Monthly HH Expend. Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					1.35*** (0.34)
GDP Per Capita Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					-0.16 (0.24)
Distance to Syria Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	-0.34 (0.26)	0.59 (0.39)	-0.40 (0.30)	-0.26 (0.29)	-0.90*** (0.34)
Province Population Log of population per province	-0.13 (0.13)	0.12 (0.15)	0.25 (0.16)	-0.11 (0.16)	0.34** (0.16)
Constant	3.00 (2.58)	-3.79 (5.15)	-3.02 (3.57)	-0.45 (3.11)	-7.26* (4.28)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Log Likelihood	-105.23	-90.77	-94.16	-80.67	-84.14
AIC	216.47	193.54	200.33	171.33	180.28

*Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1 (two-tailed).*

Appendix I.4 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Logit Regression

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		1.27** (0.59)	1.57** (0.65)	1.45** (0.67)
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				
Youth		-0.22** (0.09)	-0.20** (0.08)	-0.20** (0.09)
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29				
Internet Access		0.03** (0.01)	0.03** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Internet penetration rates per province				
Higher Ed. Unemp.	0.09*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)		0.08*** (0.02)
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				
Monthly HH Expend.	0.88*** (0.29)		0.97*** (0.30)	0.69** (0.33)
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				
Population Growth	-0.20** (0.10)		-0.29*** (0.08)	-0.23** (0.10)
Annualized population growth over two periods				
Distance to Syria	-0.84** (0.35)	-0.07 (0.42)	-0.70 (0.47)	-0.72 (0.51)
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria				
Province Population	0.19 (0.17)	0.04 (0.16)	0.49*** (0.18)	0.29 (0.19)
Log of population per province				
Constant	-5.55 (4.29)	0.68 (5.27)	-5.61 (5.41)	-2.24 (5.62)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Log Likelihood	-75.17	-72.65	-75.86	-66.94
AIC	162.35	159.29	167.73	151.88

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix I.5 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge – Saudi Arabia Robustness Check

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		1.25** (0.60)			
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					
Youth		-0.20** (0.09)			
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29					
Internet Access		0.04** (0.02)			
Internet penetration rates per province					
Women in Workforce			0.08*** (0.03)		
Proportion of women in the labour force					
Urban Population			0.001 (0.01)		
Proportion of population living in urban areas					
Population Growth			-0.06 (0.07)		
Annualized population growth over two periods					
Youth Unemployment				0.002 (0.004)	
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					
Higher Ed. Unemp.				0.02*** (0.003)	
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province					
Monthly HH Expend.					0.18*** (0.04)
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					
GDP Per Capita					-0.06 (0.04)
Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					
Distance to Syria	-0.01 (0.35)	0.95** (0.43)	0.06 (0.38)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria					
Province Population	-0.31* (0.17)	-0.11 (0.18)	0.11 (0.21)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)
Log of population per province					
Saudi Arabia	2.53*** (0.93)	2.00** (0.99)	2.26** (0.92)	0.29** (0.11)	0.45*** (0.12)
(0=not from Saudi; 1=fighter from Saudi)					
Constant	5.43 (3.50)	-0.60 (5.78)	-2.10 (4.67)	0.35 (0.39)	-0.22 (0.65)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Adjusted R²	0.03	0.12	0.08	0.27	0.20
Residual SE	3.20	3.06	3.12	0.35	0.37
F Statistic	3.26**	5.60***	4.04***	16.14***	10.82***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix I.6 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Saudi Arabia Robustness Check

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.19*** (0.06)	0.16*** (0.06)		0.19*** (0.06)
Youth				
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)		-0.02** (0.01)
Internet Access				
Internet penetration rates per province	0.003** (0.001)	0.003 (0.002)		0.003* (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp.				
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.02*** (0.002)		0.01*** (0.003)	0.01*** (0.003)
Monthly HH Expend.				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.09*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Population Growth				
Annualized population growth over two periods		-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Distance to Syria				
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	0.03 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.08** (0.04)	0.001 (0.05)
Province Population				
Log of population per province	-0.004 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Saudi Arabia				
(0=not from Saudi; 1=fighter from Saudi)	0.31*** (0.11)	0.43*** (0.11)	0.21* (0.11)	0.28** (0.11)
Constant	0.09 (0.54)	-0.04 (0.61)	-0.23 (0.52)	-0.12 (0.58)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Adjusted R²	0.35	0.29	0.30	0.36
Residual SE	0.32	0.34	0.33	0.32
F Statistic	18.20***	12.34***	16.91***	15.02***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix I.7 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge – Tunisia Robustness Check

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		0.61 (0.58)			
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					
Youth		-0.02 (0.09)			
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29					
Internet Access		0.05*** (0.02)			
Internet penetration rates per province					
Women in Workforce			0.04 (0.03)		
Proportion of women in the labour force					
Urban Population			0.01 (0.01)		
Proportion of population living in urban areas					
Population Growth			-0.04 (0.06)		
Annualized population growth over two periods					
Youth Unemployment				-0.01 (0.004)	
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					
Higher Ed. Unemp.				0.01*** (0.003)	
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province					
Monthly HH Expend.					0.12*** (0.04)
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					
GDP Per Capita					0.06* (0.03)
Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					
Distance to Syria	-0.55* (0.33)	0.45 (0.42)	-0.43 (0.36)	-0.10*** (0.04)	-0.14*** (0.04)
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria					
Province Population	-0.17 (0.16)	0.07 (0.17)	0.12 (0.19)	0.002 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)
Log of population per province					
Tunisia	4.14*** (0.66)	3.97*** (0.78)	3.82*** (0.69)	0.51*** (0.09)	0.66*** (0.08)
(0=not from Tunisia; 1=fighter from Tunisia)					
Constant	7.38** (3.27)	-5.07 (5.34)	1.16 (4.45)	0.75* (0.38)	-1.00* (0.54)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Adjusted R²	0.16	0.21	0.18	0.34	0.38
Residual SE	2.99	2.90	2.95	0.33	0.33
F Statistic	13.88***	9.83***	8.46***	22.41***	25.55***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix I.8 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Tunisia Robustness Check

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.06 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)		0.03 (0.06)
Youth				
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.004 (0.01)		-0.01 (0.01)
Internet Access				
Internet penetration rates per province	0.004*** (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)		0.003 (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp.				
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.01*** (0.003)		0.01*** (0.003)	0.01*** (0.003)
Monthly HH Expend.				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.12*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)
Population Growth				
Annualized population growth over two periods		-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Distance to Syria				
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.12** (0.05)	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.08* (0.05)
Province Population				
Log of population per province	0.01 (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)
Tunisia				
(0=not from Tunisia; 1=fighter from Tunisia)	0.41*** (0.10)	0.61*** (0.08)	0.50*** (0.08)	0.47*** (0.10)
Constant				
	0.07 (0.53)	-0.42 (0.56)	-0.26 (0.48)	-0.40 (0.55)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Adjusted R²	0.38	0.39	0.41	0.41
Residual SE	0.32	0.31	0.31	0.31
F Statistic	20.09***	18.86***	26.07***	17.70***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

**Appendix I.9 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge –
Bordering Syria Robustness Check**

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (0)	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations		1.39*			
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		(0.79)			
Youth		-0.19**			
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		(0.09)			
Internet Access		0.06***			
Internet penetration rates per province		(0.02)			
Women in Workforce			0.07***		
Proportion of women in the labour force			(0.03)		
Urban Population			0.004		
Proportion of population living in urban areas			(0.01)		
Population Growth			-0.15**		
Annualized population growth over two periods			(0.07)		
Youth Unemployment				0.003	
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				(0.004)	
Higher Ed. Unemp.				0.02***	
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				(0.003)	
Monthly HH Expend.					0.21***
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					(0.05)
GDP Per Capita					-0.02
Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					(0.04)
Distance to Syria	-0.88*	1.24	-1.25**	-0.13**	-0.08
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	(0.49)	(0.77)	(0.56)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Province Population	-0.31*	0.01	0.07	-0.02	0.04*
Log of population per province	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Bordering Syria	-2.31**	0.39	-3.15***	-0.30**	0.004
(0=no border w/ Syr; 1= fighter from country w/ border to Syr.)	(1.06)	(1.40)	(1.12)	(0.12)	(0.14)
Constant	12.41***	-5.42	8.89	1.17**	-1.01
	(4.63)	(9.27)	(6.01)	(0.51)	(0.84)
Observations	205	205	205	205	205
Adjusted R²	0.02	0.10	0.09	0.27	0.14
Residual SE	3.22	3.09	3.11	0.35	0.38
F Statistic	2.38*	4.83***	4.39***	16.22***	7.62***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

Appendix I.10 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Bordering Syria Robustness Check

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Political Transformations				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.18** (0.07)	0.13* (0.08)		0.18** (0.07)
Youth				
Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)		-0.02** (0.01)
Internet Access				
Internet penetration rates per province	0.004** (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)		0.004** (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp.				
Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.02*** (0.002)		0.01*** (0.003)	0.01*** (0.003)
Monthly HH Expend.				
Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.12*** (0.04)	0.07* (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)
Population Growth				
Annualized population growth over two periods		-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Distance to Syria				
Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	0.03 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.17*** (0.06)	-0.01 (0.08)
Province Population				
Log of population per province	0.01 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Bordering Syria (0=no border w/ Syr; 1= fighter from country w/ border to Syr.)	-0.003 (0.15)	0.002 (0.17)	-0.25* (0.13)	-0.02 (0.16)
Constant	-0.16 (0.85)	-0.54 (1.07)	0.68 (0.76)	-0.35 (1.00)
Observations	221	221	221	221
Adjusted R²	0.33	0.24	0.30	0.35
Residual SE	0.33	0.35	0.33	0.32
F Statistic	16.48***	9.78***	16.94***	13.91***

*Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; *** p < 0.01; ** p < 0.05; * p < 0.1 (two-tailed).*

Appendix J – Maximized Observations for Tables 4.6-12

This section includes results for regressions from Tables 4.6 through 4.12 in Chapter 4 using the maximum possible observations available to each model.

1. Appendix J.1 Table 4.6 Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province
2. Appendix J.2 Table 4.7 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces
3. Appendix J.3 Table 4.8 Socioeconomic Status of Fighters and Wealth of Provinces
4. Appendix J.4 Table 4.9 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces
5. Appendix J.5 Table 4.10 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces
6. Appendix J.6 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge – Maximum Number of Observations Across Models
7. Appendix J.7 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Maximum Number of Observations Across Models

Appendix J.1 Maximum Observations for Table 4.6 Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province

<i>Dependent variable: fighter under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Proportion of province aged 15-29 years old	1.30*** (0.41)	1.00** (0.40)	0.41 (0.57)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.17*** (0.02)	-0.16 (0.22)
Youth x Hub Interaction term			1.20 (0.80)
Constant	0.37*** (0.11)	0.31** (0.11)	0.47** (0.15)
Observations	1,973	1,973	1,973
Adjusted R²	0.005	0.03	0.03
Residual Standard Error	0.45 (df = 1971)	0.45 (df = 1970)	0.45 (df = 1969)
F Statistic	10.00** (df = 1; 1971)	32.00*** (df = 2; 1970)	22.00*** (df = 3; 1969)

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix J.2 Maximum Observations for Table 4.7 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter graduated from university (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Education Proportion of university graduation rates per province	0.80*** (0.11)	0.85*** (0.11)	0.88*** (0.23)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.05* (0.02)	-0.05 (0.04)
Education x Hub Interaction term			-0.03 (0.26)
Constant	0.07*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.10** (0.04)
Observations	1,942	1,942	1,942
Adjusted R²	0.03	0.03	0.03
Residual Standard Error	0.40 (df = 1940)	0.40 (df = 1939)	0.40 (df = 1938)
F Statistic	52*** (df = 1; 1940)	29*** (df = 2; 1939)	19*** (df = 3; 1938)

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix J.3 Maximum Observations for Table 4.8 Socioeconomic Status of Fighters and Wealth of Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: Fighter socioeconomic score*</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Monthly Household Expenditures			
Log household expenditures per province (2013 USD)	0.36** (0.11)	0.65*** (0.13)	-0.78*** (0.24)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.99*** (0.23)	-16.00*** (2.10)
Household Expenditure x Hub Interaction term			2.00*** (0.28)
Constant	8.60*** (0.88)	7.00*** (0.94)	17.00*** (1.70)
Observations	1330		
Adjusted R²	0.01	0.02	0.06
Residual Standard Error	3 (df=1328)	3 (df=1328)	3 (df=1328)
F Statistic	10*** (df=1; 1328)	14*** (df=2; 1327)	27*** (df=3; 1326)

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

*Fighter socioeconomic score combines profession, education, travel, and marital status. For more, see Ch. 3.

Appendix J.4 Maximum Observations for Table 4.9 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter unemployed (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Unemployment			
Unemployment rate by province	0.07 (0.14)	0.15 (0.15)	0.57** (0.21)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.05** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.05)
Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.79** (0.29)
Constant	0.10*** (0.02)	0.05+ (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)
Observations	1914		
Adjusted R²	0.00	0.004	0.01
Residual Standard Error	0.31 (df = 1912)	0.31 (df = 1912)	0.31 (df = 1912)
F Statistic	0.21	4.6*	5.5***

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix J.5 Maximum Observations for Table 4.10 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighters unemployed aged under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.13 ⁺ (0.08)	0.03 (0.08)	0.55*** (0.16)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.07*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.04)
Youth Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-0.69*** (0.18)
Constant	0.07*** (0.02)	0.03 ⁺ (0.02)	-0.06 ⁺ (0.03)
Observations	1914		
Adjusted R²	0.001	0.01	0.02
Residual Standard Error	0.29 (df = 1912)	0.29 (df = 1911)	0.29 (df = 1910)
F Statistic	2.8 ⁺ (df = 1; 1912)	10*** (df = 2; 1911)	12*** (df = 3; 1910)

Note: ⁺ $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

**Appendix J.6 Table 4.11 Factors That Describe Where Hubs Emerge –
Maximum Number of Observations Across Models**

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)					
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)
Political Transformations Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.13** (0.06)			
Youth Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		-0.03*** (0.01)			
Internet Access Internet penetration rates per province		0.01*** (0.001)			
Women in Workforce Proportion of women in the labour force			0.01*** (0.003)		
Urban Population Proportion of population living in urban areas			0.00 (0.001)		
Population Growth Annualized population growth over two periods			-0.02* (0.01)		
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province				0.003 (0.004)	
Higher Ed. Unemp. Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province				0.02*** (0.003)	
Monthly HH Expend. Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province					0.22*** (0.04)
GDP Per Capita Log GDP Per Capita Per Country					-0.07* (0.04)
Distance to Syria Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	-0.09** (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.04)
Province Population Log of population per province	-0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	1.04*** (0.38)	0.08 (0.56)	0.03 (0.51)	0.31 (0.40)	-0.27 (0.61)
Observations	255	236	230	205	248
Adjusted R²	0.02	0.12	0.11	0.25	0.15
Residual SE	0.38	0.37	0.37	0.36	0.36
F Statistic	2.97*	7.58***	6.69***	18.09***	12.16***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix J.7 Table 4.12 Comparing Competing Theories for Where Hubs Emerge – Maximum Number of Observations Across Models

Dependent variable: the presence or absence of hub (0=no; 1=yes)				
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Monthly HH Expend. Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	0.12*** (0.03)		0.12*** (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)
Population Growth Annualized population growth over two periods	-0.02** (0.01)		-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Political Transformations Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province		0.19*** (0.05)	0.12** (0.06)	0.18*** (0.06)
Youth Proportion of prov. population aged 15-29		-0.02** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Internet Access Internet penetration rates per province		0.004*** (0.001)	0.003* (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)
Higher Ed. Unemp. Unemployment rates of univ. grads by province	0.01*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)		0.01*** (0.003)
Distance to Syria Log km from province capital to Raqqa, Syria	-0.12*** (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.002 (0.05)
Province Population Log of population per province	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Constant	-0.08 (0.52)	-0.34 (0.52)	-0.38 (0.60)	-0.42 (0.58)
Observations	240	228	228	221
Adjusted R²	0.29	0.33	0.25	0.35
Residual SE	0.34	0.32	0.35	0.32
F Statistic	16.07***	19.81***	11.09***	15.72***

Note: Logs calculated as natural logs; standard error in parenthesis; * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).
Note that the observations are not consistent across models; this is due to data availability for the explanatory variables.

Appendix K – Logit Regression Results for Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, and 4.6

This section includes regression tables that relate to Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, and 4.6 in Chapter 4. These four figures visually reflect interaction effects for logit models, which fit better than the linear models used in Tables 4.6, 4.7, 4.9, and 4.10 but were more difficult to interpret. I interpreted the results from these four tables but visualized predicted probabilities in Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, and 4.6 from the models below.

1. Appendix K.1 – Logit regression results for Figure 4.2 (Youth).
2. Appendix K.2 - Logit regression results for Figure 4.3 (Education).
3. Appendix K.3 - Logit regression results for Figure 4.5 (Unemployment).
4. Appendix K.4 - Logit regression results for Figure 4.6 (Youth Unemployment).

Appendix K.1 – Logit Results for Figure 4.2 Age of Fighters and Proportion of Young Population Per Province

<i>Dependent variable: fighter under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth			
Proportion of province aged 15-29 years old	7.87* (3.19)	7.74* (3.26)	7.85 (7.72)
Hub			
(1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.81*** (0.14)	0.85 (2.28)
Youth x Hub			
Interaction term			-0.14 (8.51)
Constant	-1.22 (0.85)	-1.79* (0.88)	-1.82 (2.07)
Observations	1293		
Log Likelihood	-777	-760	-760
AIC	1558	1527	1529

Note: * $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix K.2 – Logit Results for Figure 4.3 University Graduation Rates – Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter graduated from university (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Education Proportion of university graduation rates per province	5.53*** (1.04)	5.88*** (1.06)	6.77*** (1.85)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		-0.30+ (0.17)	-0.06 (0.43)
Education x Hub Interaction term			-1.34 (2.26)
Constant	-2.46*** (0.21)	-2.29*** (0.23)	-2.44*** (0.34)
Observations	1293		
Log Likelihood	-611	-609	-609
AIC	1226	1225	1227

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix K.3 – Logit Results for Figure 4.5 Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighter unemployed (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Unemployment Unemployment rate by province	0.62 (1.68)	1.47 (1.73)	5.28* (2.29)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.55* (0.23)	1.60** (0.56)
Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-6.72* (3.19)
Constant	-2.04*** (0.25)	-2.60*** (0.35)	-3.26*** (0.46)
Observations	1293		
Log Likelihood	-486	-483	-481
AIC	976	972	969

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix K.4 – Logit Results for Figure 4.6 Youth Unemployment Rates of Fighters and Provinces

<i>Dependent variable: fighters unemployed aged under 30 years old (1=yes; 0=no)</i>			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Youth Unemployment Unemployment rates age 25-29 by province	1.09 (1.08)	0.11 (1.13)	8.95*** (2.38)
Hub (1 = yes; 0 = no)		0.96*** (0.29)	3.37*** (0.74)
Youth Unemployment x Hub Interaction term			-10.71*** (2.66)
Constant	-2.36*** (0.27)	-2.94*** (0.34)	-4.91*** (0.68)
Observations	1293		
Log Likelihood	-443	-436	-429
AIC	890	878	865

Note: + $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix L – List of Interviews

#	Name/Pseudonym	Date(s) of Interview	Consent	Total Interview
1	Mostafa	18-Feb-19	Recorded	Attempted to become a foreign fighter, from Douar Hicher
2	Sihem Mathlouthi	18-Feb-19	Recorded	Psychologist in the Ministry for Social Affairs
3	Oussama Sghaier	19-Feb-19	Recorded	MP, Member of Ennahda Executive Committee
4	Chaima	20-Feb-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
5	Fatima	20-Feb-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
6	Alma	20-Feb-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
7	Hanin	20-Feb-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
8	Khalid	2-May-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
9	Bakr	2-May-19	Recorded	Expert on foreign fighters in Tunisia
10	Omar	5-May-19	Orally	Fieldwork scouting in Kabaria
11	Bakr	7-Jun-19	Recorded	Expert on foreign fighters in Tunisia
12	Habib Sayah	8-Jun-19	Recorded	An expert on Salafi-Jihadism in Tunisia
13	Omar	10-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist in Tunis
14	Hanin	10-Jun-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
15	Marwan	10-Jun-19	Recorded	From Douar Hicher, friends were ISIS foreign fighters
16	Oussama Sghaier	11-Jun-19	Recorded	MP, Member of Ennahda Executive Committee
17	Chaima	11-Jun-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
18	Samir Dilou	12-Jun-19	Recorded	MP, Member of Ennahda Executive Committee
19	Sihem Mathlouthi	12-Jun-19	Recorded	Psychologist in the Ministry for Social Affairs
20	Sulayman	12-Jun-19	Recorded	Family member killed as an ISIS foreign fighter
21	Hasan	13-Jun-19	Recorded	Sociologist focused on soccer support groups in Tunisia
22	Mohammed Iqbel Ben Rejeb	13-Jun-19	Recorded	Head of a Tunisian NGO working for the return of foreign fighters in Syria
23	Alma	13-Jun-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
24	Zeinab	13-Jun-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
25	Walid	14-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist working in Greater Tunis
26	Massoud Romdhani	18-Jun-19	Recorded	Expert on Tunisian economic and social issues
27	Ahmed Allouch	19-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist working in Greater Tunis
28	Mostafa	19-Jun-19	Recorded	Attempted to become a foreign fighter, from Douar Hicher
29	Selim	19-Jun-19	Recorded	From Douar Hicher, friends were ISIS foreign fighters
30	Ibtesem	20-Jun-19	Recorded	Mother from Douar Hicher
31	Mariam	20-Jun-19	Recorded	Mother from Douar Hicher
32	Souhir	20-Jun-19	Recorded	Mother from Douar Hicher
33	Khalid	21-Jun-19	Recorded	Social worker in Greater Tunis
34	Mohsen	22-Jun-19	Recorded	Attempted to become a foreign fighter, from Douar Hicher
35	Hamid	22-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist working in Greater Tunis

#	Name/Pseudonym	Date(s) of Interview	Consent	Interview Information
36	Sahbi Atig	25-Jun-19	Recorded	MP and founding member of Ennahda
37	Zeina	27-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist working in Greater Tunis
38	Zied	27-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist working in Greater Tunis
39	Salwa	27-Jun-19	Recorded	Civil society activist working in Greater Tunis
40	Fauzi	27-Jun-19	Recorded	Former United Nations staff
41	Layla	27-Jun-19	Recorded	Kabaria social worker
42	Mahmoud	27-Jun-19	Recorded	Executive helping organize elections in Tunisia
43	Wassim	30-Jun-19	Orally	Salafi-Jihadi who attempted to go to Syria
44	Simon	1-Jul-19	Recorded	Staff of international NGO
45	Nadia	1-Jul-19	Recorded	Staff of international NGO
46	Abbas	2-Jul-19	Recorded	Psychologist working in Tunisia's prisons
47	Ali La'arayedh	3-Jul-19	Recorded	Founding Member of Ennahda, Former Prime Minister and Interior Minister
48	Imad	3-Jul-19	Recorded	Staff of an NGO working to repatriate Tunisian foreign fighters
49	Oussama Sghaier	4-Jul-19	Recorded	MP, Member of Ennahda Executive Committee
50	Habib Sayah	4-Jul-19	Recorded	An expert on Salafi-Jihadism in Tunisia
51	Aaron Zelin	2-Aug-19	Recorded	An expert on Salafi-Jihadism in Tunisia
52	Imen	26-Sep-19	Recorded	Staff of international NGO
53	Ahmed	26-Sep-19	Orally	Grew up in a hub similar to Douar Hicher
54	Neji	29-Feb-20	Orally	Kabaria resident from Wardia 2
55	Wael	29-Feb-20	Orally	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
56	Abbas	1-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria youth from Houmt el Marché; soccer club supporter
57	Amir	1-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria youth from Houmt el Marché; soccer club supporter
58	Adil	2-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
59	Hassan	2-Mar-20	Recorded	Delegate of Kabaria in the Tunisian municipality
60	Adil	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident; first lived in Zargayouna
61	Wael	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
62	Adham	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
63	Karim	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Hay Ennour
64	Abdelnour	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
65	Selim	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
66	Saleh	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Hay Ennour
67	Abdulqader	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Hay Ennour
68	Shoukri	3-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident from Houmt el Marché
69	Fadel	5-Mar-20	Recorded	Kabaria resident who grew up in Wardia 2
70	Hiba	3-May-20	Recorded	Sociologist who grew up in Kabaria
71	Faouzi	5-Mar-20	Recorded	Grew up in Kabaria in the 1980s; studied engineering overseas

#	Initials	Date	Consent	Interview Information
1	N	20-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Talked about Jebel Ahmar, another hub in Greater Tunis
2	Na	21-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Fieldwork scouting in Mohammedia and Fouchana
3	M	21-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Fieldwork scouting in Mohammedia and Fouchana
4	L	21-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Fieldwork scouting in Mohammedia and Fouchana
5	Am	21-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Social worker in Tunis
6	AS	22-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Tunisia parliament staff
7	MT	22-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Tunisia parliament staff
8	Se	22-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Tunisia parliament staff
9	C	22-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Tunisia parliament staff
10	Ay	28-Feb-19	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis
11	Mu	1-May-19	<i>Background</i>	Discussed soccer support groups (i.e., Ultras)
12	AE	17-May-19	<i>Background</i>	Journalist in Tunisia
13	MH	18-May-19	<i>Background</i>	Expert on migration and organized crime in Tunisia
14	J	6-Jun-19	<i>Background</i>	Embassy staff of a US/European government
15	IB	20-Jun-19	<i>Background</i>	Journalist in Tunisia
16	Y	27-Jun-19	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis
17	Mt	28-Jun-19	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis
18	Ch	28-Jun-19	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis
19	WM	29-Jun-19	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis
20	G	5-Mar-20	<i>Background</i>	Embassy staff of a US/European government
21	S	5-Mar-20	<i>Background</i>	Embassy staff of a US/European government
22	AS	(continuous)	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis
23	Nd	(continuous)	<i>Background</i>	Civil society activist working in Tunis

Note: the 23 interviews listed on this page were conducted on background; they are cited for reference but listed by initials for anonymity.

Appendix M – Map of Tunisia



Source: <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/tunisia-administrative-map.htm>

Appendix N - Research Ethics

Anonymisation

No personally identifiable information has been used to conduct this study. Subjects in the dataset have been anonymised by replacing their names and their chosen *nom de guerre* (which are not unique but could be used to identify the individual) with an ID number, which was used to identify the individual node in different networks. To further anonymise identities, I have re-coded the home addresses - when provided in the forms - from specific neighbourhoods to the largest, subnational geographic region in their home country (e.g., states, provinces, regions, et al, depending on the country). I have also removed other personally identifiable information from the research (e.g., mother's name) which are not relevant for my research. Finally, edge data (e.g., names of shared references and facilitators) only appears as numbers in adjacency matrices. Therefore, personally identifiable information about other individuals with whom fighters may share a connection are also removed.

Storage

All links to personally identifiable information have been destroyed in the data stored on the researcher's computer. Raw, sensitive data will be stored on Oxford's secure server for a minimum of three years. Data storage and utilisation techniques were approved and supported by Oxford IT and Information Security teams. This includes secure logging, implementing firewall protocols, and retaining system logs for up to 90 days. Collected data was protected in keeping with the University's Commitments (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/about/policy/>) and the 1998 Data Protection Act

(<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/dataprotection/>), and with reference to the University Information Security Policy (<http://www.it.ox.ac.uk/policies-and-guidelines/information-security-policy#d.en.81709>).

Risk Management

I am aware that there is a risk posed to me by individuals who attempt to intimidate or threaten me given the sensitive subject matter of my research. In consultation with my advisor, we assess that this risk is low, but will nonetheless be mitigated by keeping a low profile – including limiting media appearances, publications, and posts (e.g., on social media) about my whereabouts.

How the Data Were Obtained

Individual consent was not obtained from the individuals and cannot be obtained from these individuals because they have joined a terrorist group. Instead, the individuals have been anonymised and stripped of personally identifiable information for all analysis.

In early 2016, an ISIS fighter defected with personnel records containing detailed registration forms recorded by ISIS border officials who interviewed over 3,500 newly arrived foreign recruits from 2013-2014. I was given these forms by a Syrian journalist in the spring of 2016 before joining Oxford University as a student. I verified the validity of these data in two ways: first, by cross-referencing personal data in the registration files against research that I had overseen which uncovered the identities of ISIS fighters whose names were not public. Second, by verifying that its findings were consistent with other studies that had used the same dataset (e.g., Dodwell, “The Caliphate’s Global Workforce,” 2016). Several other organisations also have copies of this same

dataset, and I have discussed these data with them, including researchers at George Washington University and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), based in London.

CUREC-2 Approval

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD
Tel: +44(0)1865 616576 Fax: +44(0)1865 280467
ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk



21 May 2019

Mr Nathaniel Rosenblatt
Sociology
University of Oxford

Dear Mr Rosenblatt,

Research Ethics Approval (CUREC 2)

Ref No: R63939/RE001

Title: ISIS Foreign Fighters in the Arabic-Speaking World: Examining Local Influences on Foreign Fighters Joining the Islamic State

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to the IDREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project, which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application, you should submit details to the IDREC for consideration.

Please note that you may be required to submit an annual progress report on each anniversary of study approval, until the study is completed, and that your study may be selected for review by the SSH IDREC during an annual audit. External funders may also request ethics audits of any studies they have funded.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Claudia Kozeny-Pelling".

Claudia Kozeny-Pelling
Research Ethics Manager and Secretary SSH IDREC

cc: Professor Federico Varese, Sociology DREC Administrator