When Gender Neutrality Masks Gender Bias: Public Opinion on Female Accountability for ISIS

Violence in Iraq

Abstract

This study examines public perceptions of gender and accountability for insurgency-related violence. Our field research draws on the case of women in the Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul, Iraq. We evaluate public opinion regarding punishment of ISIS-affiliated women among residents of Mosul as well as within internal displacement camps outside Mosul. We consider theoretical arguments for punishing ISIS women based on patriarchal versus misogynistic gender norms. Consistent with an emerging literature on gender and conflict, we find that Iraqi publics see women as agents in their own right and hold them accountable for violence alongside male counterparts. However, disproportionate blame and fear of ISIS women could be masking underlying misogyny against women for transgressing gender boundaries during conflict. Our research has implications for whether female insurgents will be allowed to re-enter society or face long-term public stigma and abuse.

Introduction

To what extent do publics hold gendered views of justice and accountability for insurgent violence? Are women inside insurgencies perceived primarily as unwitting pawns and victims, as agents of violence in their own right, or some of both? Although the fate of many insurgents may be decided ultimately on the battlefield or in courts of law, public opinion about insurgent culpability and accountability is important to whether transitional justice can encourage reintegration of former insurgents into society (Elster 2004). More work is needed to understand public views on gender and insurgent violence, and the topic has become an important focus of emerging scholarship.

We consider the compelling case of female supporters of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul Iraq. While a great deal of effort has been devoted to bringing ISIS leaders and fighters to justice in Iraq, less attention has been paid to the role of women in the movement as potential perpetrators and agents of insurgent violence (Sjoberg 2018; Bond et al. 2019, Szekely 2020). Iraqi media is especially hostile toward women in ISIS (Taub 2018; Human Rights Watch 2019), suggesting that ISIS women are highly stigmatized within Iraqi society. We seek to understand how ISIS women are judged in the court of public opinion. Our research has important implications for the reintegration of female insurgents in post-conflict societies and the effectiveness of transitional justice programs.

In a December 23-30, 2018 survey, we evaluate public perceptions of female accountability for supporting ISIS. We randomly sampled Mosul regarding public punishment preferences for male and female ISIS members. We then replicated the survey in January 10-25 inside IDP camps outside Mosul, which are believed to include many families with ISIS

affiliations who fled Mosul as ISIS withdrew from the city. To explain punishment preferences, we assess theoretical arguments about patriarchal versus misogynistic gender norms surrounding female participation in insurgency. We also explore mechanisms driving punishment preferences in the form of blame attribution, threat perception of ISIS women relative to men, and victimization-based grievances.

We find that Mosul residents see ISIS women as potentially powerful agents, supporting ISIS of their own free will, and consider them radical, dangerous, critical to the functioning of ISIS organization, and instrumental in assisting ISIS fighters on the battlefield. While many Iraqis may in fact hold patriarchal views of women in society, they reject patriarchal explanations that women in ISIS were just showing obedience to their husbands and male leadership, handing down punishments proportional to women's perceived connection to ISIS leadership and combatants. At the same time, these punishment preferences may also be reinforcing misogynistic norms that sanction women for participation in traditionally male-dominated roles of violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sjoberg 2018). In contrast, people in IDP camps outside Mosul, who are believed to include many people with former ISIS affiliations, espouse more patriarchal views about the role of women in the movement, seeing women as merely following the dictates of their husbands and male leaders in line with ISIS doctrine. In experimental survey vignettes, we find that residents of Mosul and ISIS affiliates in IDP camps mete out punishments to female ISIS members comparable to male counterparts, though actual punishment preferences in the IDP camps for both ISIS men and women are consistently more lenient than in Mosul. In terms of mechanisms, women tend to be punished more severely by those who ascribe greater blame to them for ISIS violence and perceive them as a future threat. While our findings run counter to predictions about patriarchal norms driving female

accountability, they also point to concerns about underlying misogyny where the long-term stigmatization and abuse of ISIS women could potentially jeopardize their reintegration into society.

Literature

Our research speaks to the intersection of literatures on transitional justice and women in rebellion and insurgencies (Hudson et al. 2012). In the transitional justice literature, theorists often illustrate and critique portrayal of women as victims of male-driven wartime aggression and atrocities, potentially denying them agency as well as accountability in the process (Askin 1997; Teitel 2000; Elster 2004; Bell and O'Rourke 2007; Campbell 2007; Aguirre and Pietropaoli 2008; Buckley-Zistel and Zolkos 2012; Ní Aoláin, 2012; O'Rourke 2013, Jacoby 2015). This stands in contrast to the literature on female combatants, which tends to emphasize women as independent actors in their own right, capable of using and supporting violence in pursuit of political causes (Mazurana 2002; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Blee 2008; Hudson et al. 2012; Thomas and Bond 2013; Nilsson and Thapar-Björkert 2013; Poloni-Staudinger and Ortbals 2014; Woodward and Duncanson 2017; Gentry et al. 2018; Marks 2017; King 2017; Ben Shitrit et al. 2017; Nilsson 2018; Loken et al. 2018; Berry 2018; Gowrinathan 2021). While agent-victim dichotomies likely oversimplify the complexities of both female and male roles in violence, more work needs to be done to understand perceptions of women in conflict, especially with respect to justice and accountability.[1]

Our research contributes to the literature by considering whether publics perceive women as victims or agents of insurgent violence, and the extent to which they are held accountable. We conduct our research in a timely and useful case involving women in the Islamic State in Iraq.

While a number of scholars have engaged questions related to the rise of ISIS (Cockburn 2014; Weiss and Hassan 2016), ISIS recruitment strategies (Gambhir 2014; Farwell 2014; Klausen 2015), the role of women in ISIS (Peresin 2015; Peresin and Cervone 2015; Speckhard 2015; Sjoberg 2018), and ISIS accountability in general (Human Rights Watch 2017; Kao and Revkin 2018), questions about female accountability for insurgent violence is an underexplored topic, especially given the importance attributed to female agency in the literature on ISIS insurgency in Iraq and beyond (Sjoberg 2018; Bond et al. 2019; Buffan and Allison 2016; Chatterjee 2016). Specifically, we explore prevailing theories of justice and accountability based on patriarchal versus misogynistic gender norms. We also consider underlying mechanisms driving punishment preferences toward women based on blame attribution, threat perceptions, and victimization-based grievances and ostensible gender neutrality could be masking underlying gender biases.

Theory and Hypotheses

How might publics hold women accountable for wartime violence and atrocities? We examine three plausible theoretical perspectives: two that underscore gender biases and one which predicts greater impartiality in the treatment of insurgent men and women.

We begin with a perspective on gender neutrality. We anticipate that punishment preferences toward male and female ISIS supporters could be a function of the crimes they are alleged to have committed, reflecting broader norms of proportionality, and may also signal whether publics consider insurgents to be capable of re-entering into society (favoring rehabilitation) or not (favoring incapacitation through life-long incarceration or death). [2] As such, we inquire whether publics will draw distinctions not between male and female insurgents but

between "true believers" and "opportunists" in their punishment preferences, reserving harsher punishments for dedicated loyalists (Weinstein 2006; Oppenheim et al. 2015). We predict that male and female ISIS members who have closer connections to organizational leadership and combatant roles in a rebel organization will be viewed as less redeemable and therefore punished more severely than those in lesser leadership and violence-drive functions in the organization. We test the following hypothesis:

H1 (Gender Neutrality) Individuals will punish women equally to men in proportion to their insurgent roles.

Next, we consider whether women are punished differently from men based on gendered assumptions about the roles women assume during wartime. One patriarchal assumption is that women are merely victims of male perpetrators/instigators of violence (Bell and O'Rourke 2007; Campbell 2007; Aguirre and Pietropaoli 2008; Buckley-Zistel and Zolkos 2012; Ní Aoláin, 2012; O'Rourke 2013). Recent scholarship, however, argues that a victim-oriented perception of women in conflict overshadows the agency that women have in facilitating violence in various combat and combat support roles (Parkinson 2013; Thomas and Bond 2015; Loken and Zelenz 2018). Insurgent groups also appear to be strategically recruiting women to exploit public perceptions of women as non-threatening and to build legitimacy for their movements (Wood 2019); We inquire whether publics internalize patriarchal notions of violence or see women as possessing agency. If women are primarily seen as victims and men as perpetrators/instigators of violence, then this could lead to lesser punishments for women compared to men. We test the following hypothesis:

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H2 (Patriarchal Bias) Individuals will punish women less severely than men in comparable insurgent roles.

In contrast, a counterhypothesis, driven potentially by misogynistic norms of fear, blame, threat, or aversion to women, would argue that ISIS women could receive harsher punishment than men in comparable roles because women are transgressing gender boundaries about who can participate in violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sjoberg 2016; Manne 2017; Loken et al. 2018; Loken 2018; Díaz and Valji 2019). In other words, ISIS women are punished harshly *precisely* because their actions violate patriarchal norms that exclude women from participating in traditionally male domains of violence. We test the following hypotheses:

H3 (Misogynistic Bias) Individuals will punish women more severely than men in comparable insurgent roles.

Finally, we explore several plausible drivers of punishment preferences for women in the context of insurgent violence. For example, if there is a gender gap in punishment preferences between male and female insurgents, how do we know if that gap is a function of patriarchal or misogynistic beliefs about culpability for violence, or something else? Also, are gender equivalencies in punishment preferences gender-impartial or masking hidden patriarchal or misogynistic biases? First, we consider the relationship between blame attribution and accountability, where we argue that peoples' drive for retribution may increase when they feel that institutions of adjudication have failed to deliver on public expectations for justice (Kerr and

Mobekk 2007; Leebaw 2008; Lambourne 2009; Rodman 2009). We anticipate publics with underlying misogynistic attitudes toward women will ascribe greater blame to them for violence and seek out harsher punishments for insurgent women for transgressing gendered boundaries of violence. In contrast, subjects that espouse patriarchal norms will likely blame ISIS women less than men and hold them to lesser accountability for violence. Individuals with ostensibly gender-neutral punishment preferences should have comparably egalitarian attitudes toward blame attribution.

Second, we examine a threat perception mechanism. Consistent with research on integrated threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 2013), we argue that individuals are more likely to mete out harsh punishment (incapacitation rather than amnesty or rehabilitation) due to the uncertainty of future threats posed by ex-combatants and their affiliates. Threat perception may also reflect patriarchal norms if publics are more fearful of future threats posed by ISIS men, while fear of ISIS women might also proxy for misogyny. Gender neutrality in punishment preferences should correspond to egalitarian threat perceptions of male vs. female insurgents.

Third, we evaluate a grievance mechanism, where people who have been personally victimized by combatants could favor harsher retributive punishments over amnesty and rehabilitation (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).[3] If ISIS women are perceived primarily as victims or bystanders rather than perpetrators of violence, then victims may be more punitive toward ISIS men than women in exacting punishments, but victimization might also amplify misogyny toward females for their gender-defying role as violent perpetrators. While these mechanisms are not exhaustive, they provide further insights into the role gender might play in public perceptions of accountability for insurgent violence. We now turn to the specifics of the case of ISIS in Iraq.

Rationale for Case Selection

Iraq is a compelling case to address the role of gender and patriarchal/misogynistic norms in shaping public perceptions of insurgency and transitional justice. Iraqi law has a long history of patriarchal treatment of women under the law, which could reinforce patriarchal norm about male vs. female accountability for ISIS violence (Constitution of Iraq 2005; Efrati 2005; Al-Ali 2005; 2007; Al-Moumin 2007; Al-Ali and Pratt 2010). On one hand, if Iraqi society is a reflection of the law, Iraqi publics could apply harsher standards of justice and accountability for ISIS men than women. However, ISIS women present a challenge not only to Iraqi law but also to patriarchal norms regarding female agency in violence, which could lead misogynistic publics to favor harsher punishments against ISIS women for breaking conventional gender boundaries.

Following the liberation of Mosul by Iraqi Armed Forces in 2017, thousands of people and their families were detained on suspicion of having supported the Islamic State, which ruled over Mosul between 2014-2017. Many were put on trial in a process marred by widespread and systematic human rights abuses (Wille 2017; Human Rights Watch 2017; 2019). Frequently, suspected ISIS members were subject to extrajudicial killings, torture, and court trials without any pretense to due process (see Taub 2018 for a narrative illustration). However, even if Iraq courts were to adhere to the letter of the law, Iraqi law itself is often ambiguous about what to do with women who supported ISIS, married ISIS fighters, and worked in administrative positions under ISIS. Consequently, women have been handed down highly inconsistent punishments for their perceived involvement in the organization (Chatterjee 2016; Davis 2016; Wille 2017; Jones and Asquith 2018).

For example, the vast majority of detainees brought to justice for ISIS-related violence are male, despite evidence that women participated in various combat roles.[4] In some cases, female nurses who worked for ISIS in the ministry of health or female accountants who worked in the ministry of finance have been sentenced to long-term imprisonment by Iraqi courts. Punishments have also been handed down to women in indirect support roles, such as offering safe houses for ISIS operations or preparing meals for ISIS fighters.[5] Judges have also struggled with whether and how to apply the law to "jihadi brides", and punishments have been inconsistent because the law is unclear (Taub 2018; Jones and Asquith 2018). Recent field interviews by one of the authors suggest that judges typically reserve punishment for wives of higher-level ISIS leadership, while sparing punishment for wives of lower-level combatants. However, a comprehensive dataset involving ISIS trials and their outcomes is not yet available to assess the extent of gender inequality in punishment outcomes in the courts.

Given uncertain and discretionary sentencing options toward women in ISIS, we seek to understand how Iraqi civilians feel about female accountability. Specifically, we look to those who were most directly affected by ISIS rule: civilians in Mosul on both supporting and opposing sides of the insurgency who still co-exist in a post-ISIS Iraq.[6] As such, our research provides an important metric of how the public views the transitional justice process with respect to ISIS women, with implications for whether they may be allowed re-enter Iraqi society or shunned and stigmatized.

Research Design

To evaluate public perceptions of accountability for violence, we examine punishment preferences against alleged ISIS supporters and affiliates. We measure punishment preferences using a range of survey instruments, focusing on people affiliated with ISIS in an array of combatant, noncombatant and leadership roles, and whether punishment preferences vary in accordance with patriarchal or misogynistic norms about gender and violence.

To assess punishment preferences, we ask respondents what punishment they think would be appropriate for individuals with different levels of ISIS involvement ranging from top leadership, fighters, civilian workers and administrators, religious police to ordinary taxpayers (in random order). Here, our instruments build on earlier work by Kao and Revkin (2018) who found that punishments were meted out in proportion to the degree of participation in violence and functional role within in the organization but did not observe clear gender effects. Punishment options reflect different norms of justice ranging from amnesty (restorative justice), short term prison sentences (rehabilitative justice), long-term and life prison sentences (incapacitation) to the death penalty (retributive justice), though they may also be ordered in terms of severity. To probe for patriarchal and misogynistic norms about gender and accountability (H2-H3), we compare punishment preferences from survey experimental vignettes that randomly vary the gender and role of the perpetrator in ISIS. H2-H3 predict that punishment preferences will be less/more severe when the framing involves explicit reference to women in various functional roles.

To test H2-H3, we employ five survey vignette experiments with randomized treatments. The male vignettes focus on men as either ideological or opportunistic workers vs. fighters for

ISIS, which is consistent with the conventional dichotomy of rebel group motivations identified in the literature (Weinstein 2006; Oppenheim et al. 2018). The first vignette features a man who has worked for ISIS in Mosul. In the vignette, subjects receive information about whether the man is a loyal follower of ISIS or someone who worked for ISIS primarily to support his family. Subjects are asked to indicate an appropriate punishment ranging from amnesty to the death penalty. The second vignette features a man who is randomly assigned to treatments as either a loyal fighter for ISIS or someone who fought primarily to support his family. We inquire from the vignettes whether subjects are more punitive of ideological "true believers" or entrepreneurial "opportunists".

We then turn to vignettes focusing on punishment of female supporters of ISIS. We chose different vignettes for women and men consistent with their roles in ISIS, which were often segregated, especially with respect to combat and leadership roles (Cook 2005; Lahoud 2014; Chatterjee 2016). We focus on the role of women in ISIS as wives vs. workers, and wives of high-level commanders vs. low level fighters.

In the first female vignette, we ask respondents to judge the case of a women, who is randomly assigned as either the wife of an ISIS fighter (a proxy for association with ISIS-related violence), or someone who has worked for ISIS (a proxy for involvement in ISIS governance and organization). We also underscore that the wife willfully married the ISIS fighter in the first treatment to rule out the concern of forced marriage. In the second vignette, we introduce a woman who is randomly assigned to be either the wife of a low-level ISIS fighter or a high-level ISIS commander (a proxy for integration within ISIS organization). Finally, although ISIS typically enforced gender segregation in the workplace and placed restrictions on female fighters

(Chatterjee 2016), we include an additional vignette where subjects are asked how to punish someone who worked for ISIS which we randomize by gender.

In all five vignettes, the punishment options are the same, ranging from amnesty to the death penalty. This allows us to compare across male and female treatments to identify whether subjects punish men more heavily than women in various ISIS-affiliated roles. In our analysis, we will also compare the average severity of punishment across male and female treatments in the vignettes to control group measures of ISIS punishment preferences (without reference to gender).

Finally, to assess attitudes capturing underlying patriarchal and misogynistic norms in punishment preferences, we focus on three factors: blame attribution (Do people think women are being sufficiently punished for their role in ISIS compared to men?), threat perception (Do people think ISIS women pose as great a future threat as ISIS men?) and victimization-based grievance motives (Do victims punish men to a greater extent than women for their perceived role in violence?). We now turn to details of our sampling method and data collection.

Sampling and Data Collection

We conduct a survey of Mosul residents and as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in camps outside Mosul. Due to unknown population parameters resulting from massive population transfers before and after ISIS occupation, it is impossible to draw population inferences from our samples. However, we can introduce a random selection procedure to sample among those who are currently residing in Mosul and those who reside in the IDP camps. While this is less than ideal, ours is a common problem posed by conflict and post-conflict

environments due to the absence of accurate census data and highly fluid, migratory populations. Nevertheless, our samples should provide a comparative indicator of variation in punishment preferences among different cohorts and addresses problems of selection bias on those who fled Mosul when ISIS was defeated.

Sampling in Mosul was conducted via random selection of neighborhoods and random route technique at the neighborhood level. In total 401 subjects were sampled across 11 neighborhoods in Mosul (See Appendix Map for Mosul sampling locations). Among the IDPs, we purposefully sampled camps outside Mosul that were believed to house people who had supported ISIS (3 out of 15 camps in Nineveh province). Many families with suspected ties to ISIS fled Mosul during and after the liberation and many remain inside IDP camps for fear of retribution should they return to Mosul and/or because their houses were destroyed (Wille 2018). We sampled 195 respondents from three main camps south of Mosul with the permission of local camp authorities. Each camp was designed on a grid, which enabled random selection of primary sampling locations within each camp (See SI Appendix Maps for camp sampling locations). In each case, we used the same team of local enumerators led by a reputable field administrator, who was trained and supervised by one of the authors in Mosul. Fieldwork in Mosul was conducted between December 23-30, 2018 and fieldwork in the camps was completed between January 10-25, 2019. We estimate the survey response rate at approximately 42% for Mosul and 28% in the camps, which we attribute to the sensitivity of our topic and the fact that we were not compensating people to participate in the study.

In Table 1, we provide Kolmogorov-Smirnov balance tests which indicate that the samples are distinct with respect to distributions around age, education, income, and most recent employment activities. Additional demographic information about our sample is provided in an

online appendix. Mosul civilians are more educated, have higher incomes, and tend to come from more professional backgrounds of employment or are students. Camp members are conversely of lower education, income, and tend to have more manual labor backgrounds, which anecdotally fits into the public perception in Mosul of the typical ISIS demographic. There is better balance on gender, unemployment, and time spent in Mosul, where the majority of subjects lived throughout ISIS occupation. We will adjust for imbalances in the sample when conducting subsequent analysis through extended controls and matching to rule out differences in sample characteristics driving results.

Table 1. Demographic Summary

| | Mosul Civilians | | | ISIS Camps | | | |
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Balance
female	401	0.24	0.43	195	0.17	0.38	0.06
age	401	34.40	13.21	195	35.35	11.76	0.15***
education	400	2.92	0.78	195	1.96	0.82	0.40***
income	401	2.56	0.76	195	1.26	0.57	0.73***
moved	401	0.20	0.40	195	0.14	0.35	0.05
professional	401	0.34	0.47	195	0.09	0.28	0.25***
laborer	401	0.20	0.40	195	0.59	0.49	0.39***
student	401	0.29	0.46	195	0.13	0.34	0.16***
unemployed	401	0.16	0.37	195	0.18	0.39	0.02

Finally, our sampling strategy allows us to compare punishment preferences in Mosul to those displaced into IDP camps when ISIS was defeated. The camps we visited were believed to house families with ISIS affiliations, most of whom fled Mosul or were rounded up by authorities during or after the 2017 liberation (Wille 2018). We confirm this through self-reported information about ISIS affiliation. We employed an enumerator who had ties to people in the camps and would likely be able to gain their trust, though we anticipate that ISIS

affiliations are nevertheless underreported due to fears of reprisal. Despite these limitations, Table 2 indicates that 1 in 5 camp members acknowledged that they worked directly for ISIS or fought for ISIS. Over half indicate that a family member worked for ISIS, while 1 in 5 also have a family member that fought for ISIS, and nearly two-thirds have family members who have been put on trial for their role in ISIS. In total, 91% of camp IDPs indicated some form of ISIS connection or affiliation.

Table 2. Self-Reported ISIS Affiliation in Camps

ISIS Affiliation	N	Mean	SD
Worked for ISIS	195	0.21	0.41
Spouse worked for ISIS	195	0.04	0.19
Family member worked for ISIS	195	0.55	0.50
Fought for ISIS	195	0.17	0.38
Spouse fought for ISIS	195	0.11	0.32
Family member fought for ISIS	195	0.20	0.40
Family member on trial for role in ISIS	195	0.64	0.48
Had any affiliation with ISIS	195	0.92	0.28

Due to concerns about self-censorship for fear of reprisal, we did not ask respondents to indicate their current or past support for ISIS. Instead, we probed for ISIS support indirectly by asking "how many people in Mosul do you think supported ISIS during the occupation?"[7] Based on psychological projection, we reason that those who supported ISIS would estimate ISIS support in Mosul to be greater than to those who opposed ISIS. Consistent with our sampling strategy, we find that nearly two-thirds of camp members believe that "almost all" or "most people in Mosul supported ISIS" (63%), while very few civilians we sampled in Mosul (15%) think this was the case. Hence, we argue that we are capturing two distinct groups that lived among one another inside Mosul: those who supported and worked for ISIS and those who

generally did not. Ultimately, we anticipate that affinity for ISIS will also be revealed by punishment preferences, but our samples should provide a sufficient comparison point for comparing punishment preferences across different levels of prior ISIS support and opposition.

Finally, we took seriously our ethical responsibilities to our respondents and field enumerators in the conduct of this research. Our research design and sampling methodologies received IRB approval, and we followed best practices according to the American Political Science Association's recommended protocols at the time of our study (See online appendix for further discussion of ethical conduct of research).

Results

We begin by examining punishment preferences for ISIS members without any explicit reference to gender, some of which we will later use as a control when comparing gender effects. Figure 1 indicates the mean punishments for a range of ISIS affiliation categories. Punishment options range from 1 = amnesty, 2 = short-term detention, 3 = long-term detention, 4 = life in prison, or 5 = death, which are consistent with decisions used by Iraqi courts to punish ISIS detainees (HRW 2017). First, our results are consistent with earlier work by Kao and Revkin (2018) that subjects are more severe in punishing ISIS leadership, combatants, intelligence, and religious police (*Emni, Hizbeh*)[8] than those in non-combatant roles. This signals that the public are willing to apply norms of proportionality in punishment preferences. They are selective in terms of who and how much to punish.

However, we also find that ordinary Mosul civilians are more punitive toward ISIS members in general than people in IDP camps, who were not included in the Kao and Revkin

(2018) study. This suggests an in-group/out-group effect, where ISIS opponents have stronger punishment preferences than those who may have been previous ISIS supporters and affiliates.[9]

Figure 1. ISIS Punishment Preferences (gender non-specific)
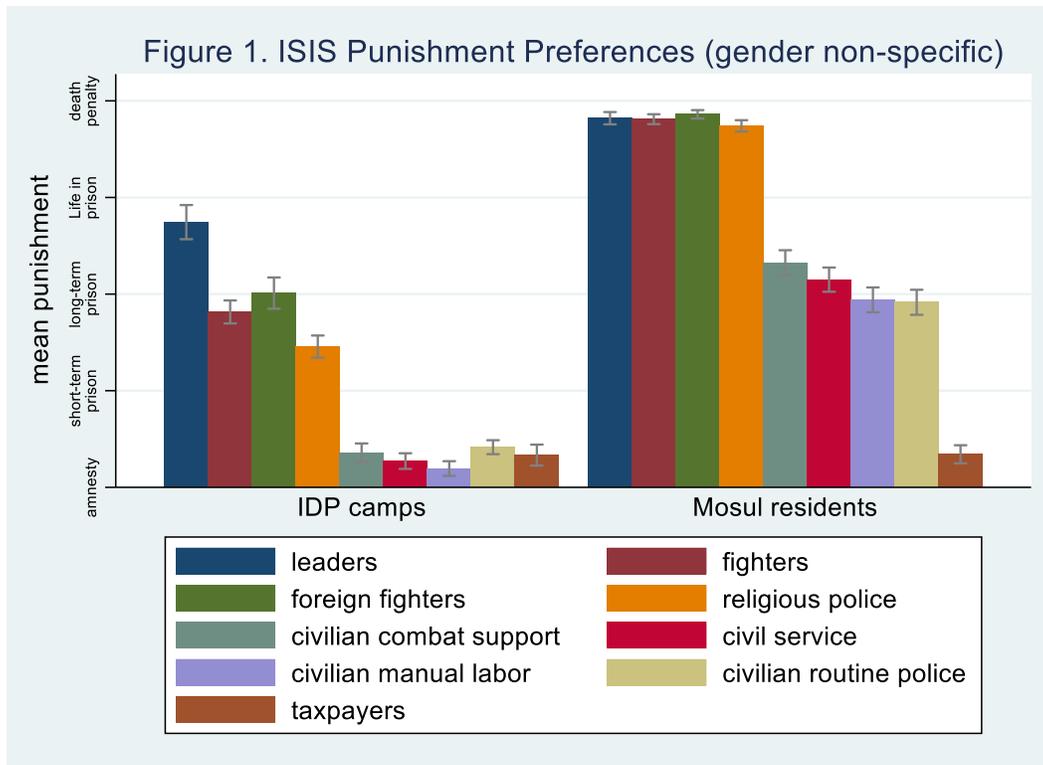
Next, to examine H1-3, we turn to our first four survey vignettes with gender specific frames (See online appendix for details). The first two vignettes involve male frames. Vignette 1 reports results where subjects decide whether to punish either 1 = a male loyalist who volunteered to fight for ISIS or 2 = an opportunistic male who only fought for ISIS to support his family. Vignette 2 involves the same two treatments, except in this case, the male worked for, rather than fought for ISIS. The next two vignettes involve female frames. In Vignette 3, subjects must decide whether to punish either 1 = the wife of an ISIS fighter or 2 = a woman who worked for ISIS. In Vignette 4, subjects decide how to punish either 1 = the wife of a low-level ISIS fighter or 2 = the wife of a high-level ISIS commander. In all cases, the dependent variable ranges from 1 = amnesty to 5 = death penalty.

Figure 2 indicates responses to each treatment item in the four vignettes (eight treatment groups total). As before, there appears to be in-group/out-group bias with respect to punishment of ISIS. Mosul residents are more punitive than IDP camp members across all treatment conditions. Second, consistent with Kao and Revkin (2018) subjects tend to be more punitive of ISIS combatants than non-combatants, suggesting proportionality with respect to participation in violence, especially for Mosul civilians. IDP camp members, however, are less selective in punishing different groups and less punitive overall. Finally, in opposition to predictions of gender bias (H2-H3), neither camp members nor Mosul civilians appear to be especially lenient or severe toward ISIS women compared to ISIS men. Mosul civilians are willing to punish female ISIS affiliates as severely as men (the mean response being long-term detention). People in IDP camps are less punitive of women than Mosul civilians, but their punishment of women is still at parity with punishment of men (the mean response being between amnesty and short-term detention). This suggests gender neutrality in punishment preferences consistent with H1.

Figure 2. Punishment Preferences by Perpetrator Gender
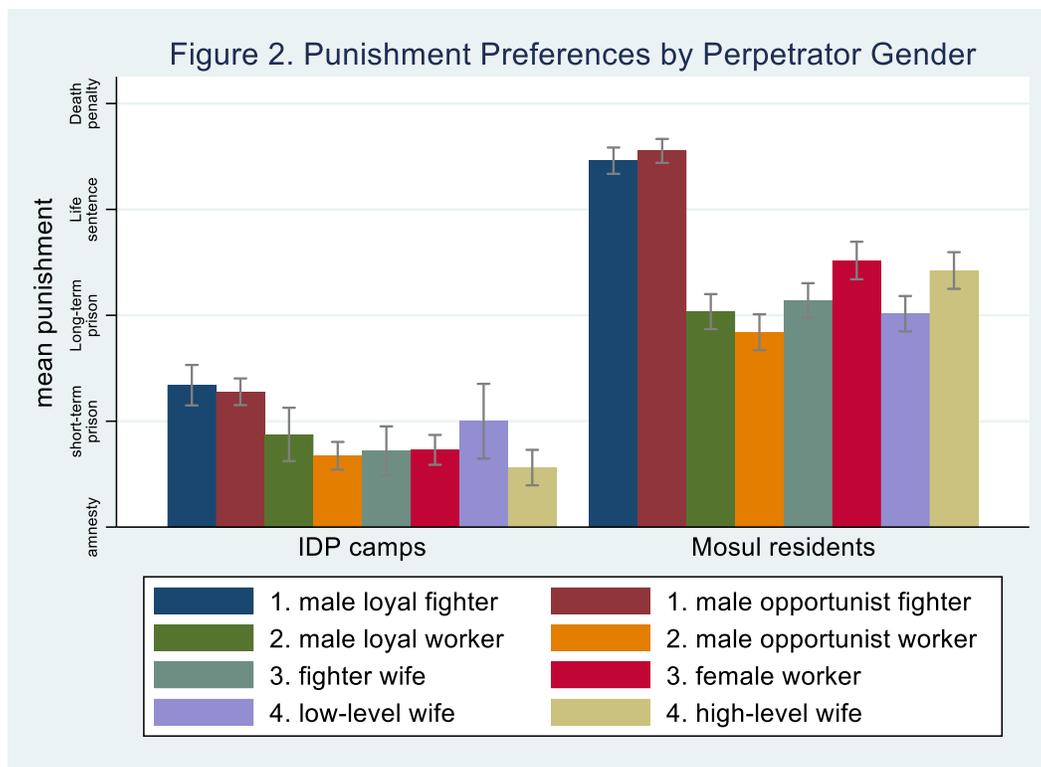
As none of these four vignettes directly manipulated gender in the treatment, we conducted an additional fifth vignette in a follow-up May 2019 survey of Mosul civilians only (N =357).[10] In Vignette 5, subjects must decide how to punish someone who is accused of working for ISIS, randomized by gender. We find that gender effects on punishments of ISIS workers are not significant in the Mosul sample (t = 1.08, p<0.14). Consistent with Figure 2, the average punishment was long-term imprisonment in both the male treatment (mean = 2.91, SD = 0.56) and in the female treatment (mean = 2.83, SD =0.71). These additional results reinforce H1 on how functional role in the organization is more important than gender in determining punishment.

So far, we have found support for identity-based and proportionality-based explanations for how publics think about justice and insurgent accountability, but we do not find strong gender effects. Perhaps, however, what we may perceive as gender neutrality in punishment preferences masks underlying parochial or misogynistic inclinations? Next, we probe for

mechanisms to explain why some punish ISIS more than others and that might capture underlying attitudes toward gender and insurgent violence. To do this, we focus on blame attribution, threat perceptions of ISIS, and grievance-based motivations.

To measure perceptions of blame attribution, we ask respondents whether they agree or disagree that different groups are being sufficiently punished for their role in ISIS on a four-point scale. If patriarchal norms are prevalent, we would anticipate lower blame attribution for ISIS women. If misogynistic norms are pervasive, we might see greater blame for ISIS women than men. We ask subjects to respond to items across different functional categories of ISIS membership ranging from ISIS leadership, fighters, foreign fighters, civilian followers, as well as women who married ISIS leaders and fighters, and women who worked for ISIS (See SI Figure 3 and SI Questionnaire). As responses to these items were highly inter-correlated, we use factor analysis to create an index called *female blame attribution* which scores all seven items from strongly agree to strongly disagree that ISIS affiliates are being sufficiently punished (SI Table 1). We also created a separate *blame women* index which only scores the items on ISIS wives and female workers. Higher scores on the indices should correspond to greater desire for punishment of women in ISIS.

To measure threat perception, we utilize a series of questions related to the future threat posed by ISIS men and women to Iraqi security. We ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with a series of six statements regarding the threat women in ISIS pose relative to men (See SI Figure 4 and SI Questionnaire). Statements include the following: "women in ISIS were just as radical as men", "…could be just as dangerous as men in the future"; "...played an important role in ISIS organization"; "…in supporting ISIS fighters" and two contradictory statements that women "who worked for ISIS should not be punished because the men were in

charge" and "ISIS wives should not be punished because they were only following their husbands". Factor analysis indicated that responses to these items are highly inter-correlated (SI Table 2). We score these items into a common index called *female threat perception* ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree on whether women are as dangerous as men. Higher scores on the index indicate greater threat perception of ISIS women relative to men.

Finally, to measure victimization-based punitive motives, we ask all respondents to recount abuses they or family members incurred during ISIS occupation.[11] Abuses range from being punished for violating ISIS rules and laws, personal injury, injury or death at the hands of an ISIS member, being threatened or imprisoned by ISIS, having one's home occupied or looted by ISIS, or whether female family members were abused or assaulted by ISIS. Factor analysis indicates that victimization items also score well together such that the experiences of victimization are highly inter-correlated (See SI Figure 5, Table 3). We combined all items into a single index called *victimization* to measure grievance-based incentives for punishing ISIS members. We did not ask about the gender of the perpetrator of violence, though we anticipate that if victims identify ISIS men as primary perpetrators of violence, then victims would be more willing to punish ISIS men over ISIS women. Higher scores on the index indicate increasing number of victimization events experienced under ISIS rule.

In Figure 3 below, we note that all three indices (blame attribution, threat perception, and victimization) are more elevated among Mosul residents than those who live in the IDP camps, which offers a plausible mechanistic explanation for why Mosul civilians are more punitive toward ISIS (See SI Figure 6 for structural equation models). Mosul civilians are more likely to blame both men and women for ISIS violence and feel threatened by both male and female ISIS members in the future compared to those in IDP camps.[12]
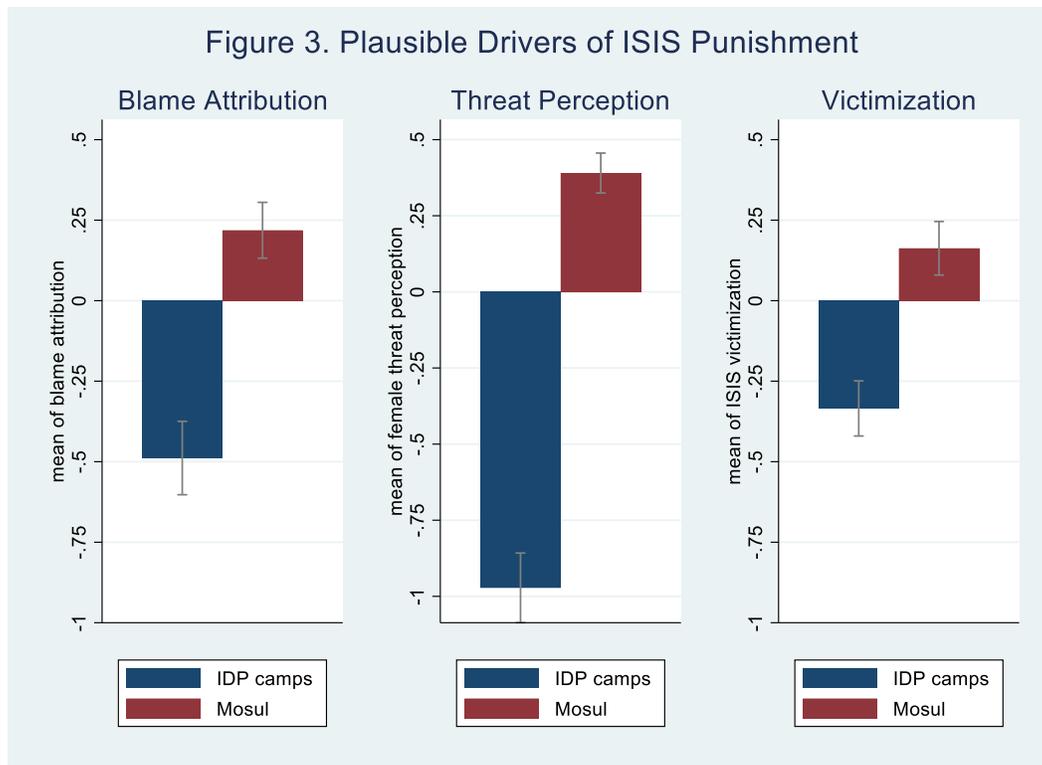
Figure 3. Plausible Drivers of ISIS Punishment

Table 3 below reports results from OLS regression on punishment choices for individuals with varying ISIS affiliations.[13] Each model focuses on evaluating hypotheses regarding patriarchal and misogynistic gender norms using predictor variables for female blame attribution, threat perception, and victimization while also controlling for demographic variation in the sample.

Table 3. Punishment Preferences for ISIS Involvement (OLS regression)

Model	(1) Punishment Severity (Gender Neutral)	(2) Punishment Severity (Gender Neutral)	(3) Punishment Severity (Gender Treatments)
Mosul residents	1.578*** (0.0830)	1.390*** (0.0776)	0.933*** (0.124)
proportionality		0.380***	

	(1)	(2)	(3)
			(0.00739)
Loyal male worker			-0.0553
			(0.0811)
Opportunist male worker			-0.0254
			(0.0687)
Female fighter wife			0.00795
			(0.0780)
Female worker			0.456***
			(0.0650)
Female wife low-level			-0.0530
			(0.0800)
Female wife high-level			0.343***
			(0.0713)
Female blame attribution	0.0577*	0.0537*	0.153***
	(0.0311)	(0.0283)	(0.0455)
Female threat perception	0.131***	0.115***	0.229***
	(0.0387)	(0.0354)	(0.0588)
victimization	0.0272	0.0207	0.0751
	(0.0334)	(0.0313)	(0.0526)
female	-0.0584	-0.0584	-0.224***
	(0.0676)	(0.0617)	(0.0860)
age	-0.000560	-0.00127	-0.000725
	(0.00273)	(0.00256)	(0.00398)
education	-0.103***	-0.0866**	-0.0777
	(0.0388)	(0.0362)	(0.0548)
income	0.0884**	0.0796**	0.134**
	(0.0392)	(0.0360)	(0.0541)
professional	0.158*	0.159*	0.140
	(0.0937)	(0.0870)	(0.131)
laborer	0.00234	0.0268	-0.151
	(0.0898)	(0.0838)	(0.123)
unemployed	0.0633	0.0701	0.0257
	(0.0842)	(0.0772)	(0.125)
moved	0.135**	0.139**	0.114
	(0.0662)	(0.0621)	(0.0899)
Constant	2.316***	0.316**	1.925***
	(0.144)	(0.135)	(0.200)
Observations	544	4,881	2,167
Respondents	544	544	544
adj. r2	0.646	0.575	0.302

Robust standard errors clustered by respondent in parentheses
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

In Model 1, the dependent variable (*punishisis*) is an index of punishment choices for ISIS affiliates using the combined baseline gender-neutral instruments from Figure 1. These items score well indicating that people tend to consistently favor strong or limited punishments for people with different levels of ISIS affiliation (Cronbach alpha = 0.93, SI Table 4). Model 1 indicates that Mosul residents are significantly more punitive of ISIS than those in the camps across different functional roles in ISIS.

In Model 2, the dependent variable (*punishmentrange*) disaggregates all the punishment preferences for each subject in Model 1. As there were nine different gender-neutral functional roles related to supporting ISIS ranging from top leadership to merely taxpayers, this increases the overall N from 544 to 4,881 observations (nine punishment preferences for each subject). Regressions are estimated controlling for these individual fixed effects using clustered standard errors. The key independent variable in this model is *proportionality*, which treats each category of ISIS affiliation as increasing in importance to the organization, ranging from 1 = someone who payed taxes to ISIS to 9 = ISIS leadership. Consistent with Kao and Revkin (2018), Model 2 indicates that punishment preferences become more severe as the target increases in relative importance within the movement in relationship to leadership and involvement in violence. However, even under ostensibly gender-neutral treatments, we see that female blame attribution and threat perception correlates with harsher punishments.

Finally, Model 3 examines the impact of gender by comparing punishment preferences across vignettes with different gender treatments. We exclude the male fighter Vignette 1, as we do not have comparable treatments for female fighters.[14] Model 3 then utilizes a dependent variable (*punishgender*) which combines male and female vignette punishment preferences for each treatment group and compares them to a non-gender specific point of reference: the

punishment of ISIS civilian supporters from Figure 1. As each respondent completed three different vignette treatments plus the non-gender specific reference group, the total N increases by roughly four from 544 to 2,167. The model controls for these individual fixed effects using clustered standard errors.

If patriarchal norms about accountability are driving punishment preferences (H2), then we would expect Model 3 to show men being punished more severely than women in various non-combatant roles or compared to our non-gender specific reference point, which is represented by the constant term in the regression. However, male workers are punished comparably to our reference point of civilian ISIS supporters as well as to ISIS wives in general and wives of low-level ISIS combatants. Furthermore, subjects do not clearly discern between male "true believers" vs. "opportunists" when it comes to working for ISIS (Oppenheim et al. 2017). They punish them consistently. [15] Among the female treatments, respondents tended to punish women more if they worked for ISIS or if they were married to an ISIS commander compared to either working men or to the civilian reference group, which is consistent with H3.[16] Overall, Model 3 indicates that women are perceived as having accountability alongside men who worked for ISIS and are not willing to absolve wives of ISIS combatants and leaders of punishment. These preferences do not support H2 regarding patriarchal norms of accountability. However, punishment preferences do suggest greater merit for underlying misogynistic bias against women predicted by H3.

To further evaluate misogyny in punishment preferences (H3), we turn to mechanistic variables related to beliefs about female blame attribution, threat perception of female ISIS followers, and victimization-based grievances. In all three models, we find that both greater female blame attribution and female threat perception are predictive of more severe punishments,

which would be consistent with potential misogynistic blame and fear of ISIS women driving harsher punishment. Results are consistent when we measure blame attribution only for ISIS women, excluding other reference categories. In contrast, victimization by ISIS does not predict more severe punishments. The lack of correlation between victimization and more severe punishment preferences is surprising, but we do not have sufficient information to understand how subjects might direct victimization-related grievances toward male versus female perpetrators of violence. Public attitudes toward female perpetrators of violence should be unpacked in future research.

Finally, extended demographic controls indicate that female subjects are less punitive toward ISIS than male subjects in survey vignettes with gender treatments, which provides further evidence for how misogynistic punishment preferences could be amplified among men. Also, education, income, and having a professional employment background is correlated with increasing severity of punishment for ISIS. As we noted in our demographic Table 1, people from ISIS affiliated families tended to be of lower income and less education than Mosul civilian counterparts. Income and educational effects on harsher punishment could be reflecting class differences between Mosul civilians and their ISIS affiliated IDP counterparts. Also, subjects who were displaced from Mosul during ISIS rule are more punitive, which could represent another indirect proxy for victimization-related grievances. However, if victimization were driving punishment preferences, we should observe stronger affects in our direct victimization measure, but we do not. We also find that the differences in punishment preferences between Mosul and IDP camps are robust to inverse probability regression weighting and propensity score matching to adjust for demographic imbalances across the two samples (SI Tables 6-8).

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Overall, we observe strong support in our analysis for gender neutrality (H1) based on beliefs about proportionality between crime and punishment in punishment preferences. We do not find support for patriarchal norms driving punishment preferences toward ISIS (H2): publics do not clearly assign more severe punishments to ISIS men compared to ISIS women. However, those who espouse greater blame and fear of ISIS women exact harsher punishments across both gender and gender neutral treatments, which suggests how misogynistic biases could be influencing punishment preferences consistent with H3.

Further Exploration of Misogyny in Punishment Preferences

Our initial study raises questions about whether the gender neutrality we observed in punishment preferences could be masking misogynistic biases against women in insurgency. We ran a follow-up study with 600 respondents from Mosul in October 2021 and we found no variation in punishment preferences between female fighters and fighters in gender neutral treatments. Over 94% of the sample favored the death penalty for both.[17] However, survey items measuring misogynistic attitudes toward women were highly predictive of death penalty punishments for females ISIS fighters. We measure misogynistic attitudes using two items. First, we ask all respondents whether they agree or disagree that "Men make better fighters than women during wartime" to which 52% somewhat agreed and 42% strongly agreed. We also asked whether they agree or disagree that "women should stay out of fighting during warfare" to which 82% strongly agreed and 12% somewhat agreed. There was surprisingly no moderation by gender on these response items. Women in the sample were just as likely to hold hostile views of female combatants as men. Table 3 reports results from OLS regression on punishment

preferences for female ISIS fighters using these predictor items along with demographic controls. Agreement with both items strongly predicts death penalty punishments for female ISIS fighters. In support of H3, results from the follow-up study provides further evidence for how women are being punished in part for transgressing gendered boundaries during conflict.[18] Gender neutrality in punishment preferences obscures a clear influence of misogynistic bias against female insurgents.

Table 3. Predictors of Punishment for Female ISIS Fighters (OLS regression)

DV	(1) Female fighter punishment
Agree: Men make better fighters than women	0.134***
	(0.0124)
Agree: Women should stay out of fighting	0.276***
	(0.0183)
female	-0.000464
	(0.0109)
age	-0.00152*
	(0.000920)
education	0.0169*
	(0.00974)
professional	0.00443
	(0.0120)
laborer	-0.0371**
	(0.0155)
unemployed	0.0174
	(0.0569)
income	0.00310
	(0.0114)
Constant	3.847***
	(0.0794)
Observations	600
R-squared	0.724
adj. r2	0.719

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Conclusion

Our research indicates that public perceptions of justice and accountability toward women in ISIS, while on the surface appearing gender-neutral, could mask underling gender-biases that predispose them to harsh punishment of ISIS women. Civilians in Mosul see women as independent actors, regard women in ISIS as a future threat, and feel that they are not being held sufficiently accountable for ISIS violence compared to ISIS men. As such, our findings speak to an emerging literature on women as autonomous agents of insurgent violence. While Mosul residents are wary of ISIS, as reflected in their austere punishment preferences against ISIS functionaries, they are also capable of applying punishments proportionately, holding leaders and combatants to a higher standard of accountability than non-combatant civilian followers and supporters. At the same time, they seek accountability for women who voluntarily married into the organization or fought or worked for ISIS in some volitional capacity at levels equal to or greater than men in comparable functional roles.

We also observe disparities in how Mosul civilians and ISIS affiliated families think about accountability. Mosul civilians are much more favorable to retributive justice, willing to hand down long-term prison sentences or death in many cases to ISIS supporters. Those in the camps, however, prefer a more restorative and rehabilitative approach, involving amnesty and short-term incarceration for non-violent ISIS members, both male and female. However, Iraqi law is currently siding with Mosul civilians, and judges routinely dispense harsh sentences to suspected ISIS members in trials that, in many cases, lack any pretense to due process (Human Rights Watch 2017).

This austere approach to accountability, however, will likely have long-term detrimental effects on peace and stability, and should serve as a valuable lesson for transitional justice processes elsewhere. Retributive justice, while politically favorable in Mosul, could lead to the re-mobilization of defeated insurgents, as is already happening in Iraq. Furthermore, public perceptions of ISIS women as dangerous agents of violence may reflect underlying misogynistic norms, and harsh retributive punishments will likely reinforce social stigmatization and may push some ISIS women back into insurgency alongside their male counterparts, as well as their children. A better approach, we would argue, would involve some realistic peace-justice trade-offs, that while holding ISIS men and women accountable, would also offer incentives for de-mobilization and re-integration into society. Otherwise, Iraq's transitional justice program is a blueprint for prolonging conflict traps, and a model not to emulate, but avoid.

Finally, our research is not an exhaustive treatment of issues related to women in conflict or transitional justice. More research should explore patriarchal and misogynistic norms driving attitudes toward women as participants in violence and potential mechanisms including greater emphasis on social customs and attributes toward women in society more broadly than we have covered here.[19] More studies should also be conducted in cases where the lines between male and female venues for participation in violence are more blurred than was the case with ISIS in Iraq.[20] Despite, however, the ostensible prohibitions in ISIS ideology against integrating men and women into combat and combat support roles, and some de facto evidence to the contrary, we find that Iraqi publics see women in ISIS in many ways as sharing culpability with male counterparts. They are also willing to hold them accountable, justly or unjustly, alongside men, which makes Iraq a compelling case for understanding public perceptions of female agency and responsibility for political violence. It may also reveal how underlying misogynistic norms

toward women who take up the cause of insurgency can become embedded in the justice and

accountability processes under the pretenses of fairness and gender neutrality.

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[1] A similar victim-perpetrator dichotomy can be found in the criminal justice literature (Messerschmidt 1993; Greenfeld and Snell 1999), and in the literature on children in conflict (Beber and Blattman 2013).

[2] See online appendix for further theoretical discussion of restorative versus retributive forms of justice.

[3] We cannot evaluate comparable "greed" mechanisms due to the absence of clear compensatory justice instruments in the Iraqi case.

[4] Despite ISIS propaganda to the contrary, women did participate in combat. For example, in a rare case, a German female ISIS member was convicted by an Iraqi court for her combatant role as a suspected sniper. See Bond et al. 2019.

[5] Based on observations of women at ISIS trials by one of the authors as well as interviews with ISIS trial judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys.

[6] We lacked the resources to conduct a nationwide survey of Iraq, so we concentrated on Mosul as a critical case for transitional justice where insurgency supporters and opponents cohabitate.

[7] We were unable to include more sophisticated list or endorsement experiments to evaluate ISIS support due to our small sample size (Blair et al. 2014). We expect that support for ISIS is generally under-reported but support for ISIS may also be revealed in punishment preferences.

[8] See Speckhard and Yayla (2017) for detailed discussion of ISIS religious police.

[9] See the online appendix for further theoretical discussion of identity-based predictors of punishment preferences.

[10] The May 2019 survey focused on other topics, and we are limited in our analysis beyond this additional vignette. See the online appendix for further details.

[11] This was done at the end of the survey to avoid explicit priming on victimization.

[12] Comparing across categories of blame attribution, Mosul civilians on average indicate that females are not being sufficiently punished compared to other categories of leaders, fighters, and non-gender specific civilian supporters (paired t-test = 2.01, p<0.022) while those in IDP camps tend to attribute greater blame to ISIS males over females (paired t-test = 2.45, p<0.008).

[13] Results are robust to ordered-probit specifications. See online appendix.

[14] In Vignette 1, punishments far exceeded those of non-combatant ISIS members as predicted by our proportionality hypothesis (See SI Table 5).

[15] The same is true for punishment of ISIS male combatants. See SI Table 5.

[16] See SI Table 5 for simple binary treatment comparisons for each vignette.

[17] Compared to the 2018 Mosul sample, mean punishment preferences for fighters has increased (two-sample t-test = 4.58, p<0.0000). Only 58% of respondents in 2018 favored the death penalty for ISIS fighters compared to 94% in 2021.

[18] See online appendix for further information about the follow-up study.

[19] Further testing of Sjoberg's (2018) three narratives (mother-monster-whore) surrounding women and violence as well as public perceptions of female combatants as "good guys" vs. "bad guys" are fruitful directions for future research.

[20] The case of Kurish female fighters in Rojava could serve as an example (see Tezcür 2020).