

Child is Father of the Man? Retribution or Reintegration of ISIS Youth in Mosul, Iraq

Abstract

What should be done with insurgent youth, from adolescent fighters to very young children? Using original survey data, we examine public opinion regarding adolescent/child soldiers and young children in the Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul Iraq. Focusing retrospectively, we inquire about retributive punishment for minors who fought and worked for the Islamic State relative to adults. We find that punishment preferences toward minors are conditional on their participation in violence, beliefs about the determinants of adulthood and the role of agency versus coercion in the recruitment process. Thinking prospectively, we find the public divided between fear about the dangers posed by radicalized children of insurgency and hope for rehabilitation and reintegration. Our results raise concerns about detrimental effects of retributive justice and social stigma on the well-being of insurgent youth and children both now and later into adulthood.

Introduction

To what extent are publics willing to hold youth of fighting age accountable for violence? How much do publics fear the immediate and long-term security threats posed by child soldiers and children of insurgency in their societies? Here, we employ Wordsworth's dictum in the title of our manuscript to convey the often held societal belief that childhood experience shapes future adult behavior. In the context of insurgency and terrorist violence, this concern is reinforced by research on the consequences of youth and childhood exposure to violence for long-term mental health, human capital, and violence and aggression in adulthood (Joshi and O'Donnell 2003; Qouta et al. 2008; Attanayake 2009; Hecker et al. 2015; Sloan and Mann 2016; Slone et al. 2016). Currently, however, our understanding of public opinion regarding insurgent youth is limited and merits greater attention. In this study, we focus on public perceptions of justice and accountability for minors who participated in the Islamic State (ISIS) insurgency in Mosul, Iraq. Based on a survey of punishment preferences ranging from amnesty to death, we inquire whether ordinary civilians in Mosul hold minors to a different standard of justice than adults, and for individuals with different functional levels of involvement in ISIS violence and at different ages. We also consider public regard for the future security threats posed by ISIS youth and prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration.

We find that while ordinary Mosul civilians, who lived under ISIS rule from 2014-2017, are less punitive toward ISIS youth compared to adults, they are more punitive toward adolescent insurgent fighters than non-fighters. A willingness to exact retributive punishment against young insurgents is also moderated by beliefs about what defines adulthood and the role of agency

versus coercion in the recruitment process. We also assess the prospective threats posed by ISIS youth to future security. On this last point, we find a divergence of opinion. While some civilians regard children of insurgency as a future security threat and would prefer they remain in under state supervision, others are more optimistic about their rehabilitation. Our research speaks to the challenges of reintegrating insurgent youth into society, raising concerns about long-term detrimental effects of social stigma and alienation from society on youth radicalization and recurrent violence.

Literature

The lines between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are often blurred during conflict.¹ The historical record is clear that children have almost always played a role in combat to some degree (Martin and Coles 2002; Drumbl 2019). Social science research has generally focused on two fronts: recruitment of children into conflict and post-conflict recovery and reintegration into society. First, many studies have examined the recruitment of children and adolescents into armed insurgency (Rosen 2005; Becker 2010; Denov 2010; Honwana 2011; Lasley and Thyne 2015; Cardeli et al. 2019; Cleave and Watkins 2020; Haer et al. 2020; Faulkner et al. 2020; Karlsson 2020) as well as into terrorist organizations (Bloom 2018; 2019a-b). Here, research shows that children can play a useful role within insurgencies and terrorist organizations because they are potentially easier to manipulate and exploit than adults, even if

¹ Here we often use concepts of youth, children, adolescents, juveniles, and minors somewhat interchangeably unless otherwise noted. This reflects some of the vagaries in the literature on the precision of these concepts with respect to age and development (ex. child soldier).

they are somewhat weaker fighters (Beber and Blattman 2013). Hence, there is an underlying logic to child soldiering that bolsters the historical evidence of its widespread practice.

Other research focuses on the aftermath of violence, emphasizing the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of child soldiers (Verhey 2001; Shepler 2005; Wessells 2006, 2019; Blattman and Annan 2008; Honwana 2018). Blattman and Annan (2008) indicate that the long-term effects of conflict on child soldiers is not well understood. On one hand, conflict exposure in general has been shown to have negative consequences for children (Machel 2002), and Blattman and Annan (2010) have found long-term negative economic and social consequences of child soldiering in terms of education, employment, and future earnings. Several studies also point to long-term traumatizing effects and mental health problems of child soldiers, especially when they are ostracized from society and their families (Derluyn et al. 2004; Betancourt et al. 2019). With increasing parental and social support, however, others studies show greater resilience (Klasen et al. 2010; Kohrt et al. 2016). A number of scholars are also examining the long-term effects of sexual abuse of child soldiers, drawing attention to exploitation of both male and often overlooked female child soldiers (Mazurana 2001; Alfredson 2019; Whittman 2019).

Finally, child soldiers also pose a number of legal conundrums hampering reintegration (Rosen 2009; Drumbl 2012). For example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines adulthood at eighteen years, and the 1998 Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court declares the recruitment of children under the age of fifteen into any armed services as a war crime. However, in practice, states adopt varying punitive, rehabilitative, and restorative methods when dealing with former child soldiers, often blurring the lines between children as victims and perpetrators before the law (Kiyala et al. 2020).

Within the broader literature on children in conflict and child soldiers, we seek to help fill an important gap. Specifically, there is a need for greater theoretical and empirical investigation of public perceptions of children in insurgencies and terrorist organizations, whether they are perceived as victims or as perpetrators (or both), and what publics think should be done with them. Although responsibility for former child soldiers and children of insurgency may ultimately rest with state authorities, public opinion can influence state policy, and public opinion could play a critical role in determining whether children of insurgency are accepted back into society or face long-term stigma and abuse.

Theory and Hypotheses

We approach public opinion regarding children of insurgency both retrospectively and prospectively. We begin retrospectively with a discussion about public attitudes toward justice and accountability for insurgent violence. Although such questions are often the purview of the law, many scholars underscore the importance of public opinion to the success of transitional justice after violence in reconciling opposing sides and reintegrating former combatants into society (Kritz 1995; Elster 2004; Teitel 2000, 2015; Sriram 2013; Hall et al. 2018). In order for transitional justice to achieve these goals, the public must see the process as a legitimate instrument for establishing justice and accountability for insurgent violence and be willing to support reintegration and reconciliation.

Who do publics think should be held accountable for insurgent violence and to what end? We approach public views on insurgent accountability through the lens of punishment preferences. Experimental research in psychology indicates that the most common public

intuitions about justice are of a retributive nature; those who are perceived to have committed crimes are expected to suffer as a means of atonement and as a deterrent to future crime (Carlsmith and Darley 2008). In the case of insurgency warfare, we argue that when one side triumphs over another, we assume that the winning side will exact punitive measures against the losers, consistent with a broad literature on “victor’s justice” (Ho et al. 2002; Meernik 2003; Wringe 2006; Minear 2015). Such practices also underscore the importance of group identity to perceptions of justice in criminology research (Tyler and Blader 2000), and the polarizing effects of violence on in-group/out-group biases (Bauer et al. 2016). Hence, when insurgents lose, we assume that insurgent opponents will seek retribution in the form of punishments for those perceived as accountable for insurgent violence.

Our main question, however, is whether publics who oppose insurgency draw any lines between punishing adults and those who could be considered as below some threshold of adulthood i.e. juveniles, minors, underage, adolescents, or children, conceptual distinctions notwithstanding. We hypothesize that adults within an insurgency will be held to higher standards of accountability, and therefore punished more severely than those who are considered minors, adolescents, or children. We test the following hypothesis.

H1 (Adulthood) People will seek to punish adult members of an insurgency more severely than those perceived to be below the threshold of adulthood.

Perception of what constitutes the threshold for adulthood is a potentially important moderator of this hypothesis. One common heuristic for determining adulthood is age based on the law, but people may also consider social, developmental, psychological, and cultural bases

for understanding what it means to be an adult (Buchman and Kreisi 2011; Settersen et al. 2015), especially for holding minors accountable to justice (Cicourel 1995; Munsu and Goldson 2006; Terrill 2010). From a development perspective, a large literature chronicles the various stages of cognitive human development from early childhood through adolescence and into adulthood (Piaget 1972; Kroger 2006). Psychological and neurobiological research on moral reasoning, cognitive and emotional maturity have shown diminished capacities among adolescents in general and among juvenile criminal offenders specifically compared to adults (Romeral et al. 2018; Luna and Wright 2016; Murty et al. 2016). We expect publics may hold different standards of accountability for adults compared to minors, based on awareness of juvenile limitations in competency and responsibility for their actions (Grisso et al. 2003; Bradley et al. 2012). Hence, we argue that retributive punishment preferences toward minors are likely moderated by different conceptions of adulthood and by the perceived agency and capacity of the minor to make decisions.

Punishment preferences may also be moderated by whether manipulation and/or coercion played a role in the minor's recruitment by the insurgency. Coercion is a common recruitment method for insurgencies (Gates 2017; Faulkner et al. 2020), which publics may take into account. However, scholars have also examined push factors (poverty, lack of education or employment) as well as pull factors (security, food, identity or belonging, or profit) that can draw children and adolescents into insurgency in ways that publics might perceive as "voluntary" (Dudenhoefer 2016). In summary, we expect that punishment preferences for adults versus children may vary according to the perceived role of agency/free will or coercion in the recruitment process.

Next, we consider whether violent behavior intensifies punishment preferences for children. Even if publics acknowledge that some members of an insurgency may fall below thresholds of adulthood, they may nonetheless seek to punish them for participation in insurgent violence. Research in criminology underscores the relationship between violence and proportionality in punishment outcomes (Von Hirsch 1992; Von Hirsch and Ashworth 2005). Those who committed lesser violent crimes are more likely to receive rehabilitative or restorative forms of punishment (Braithwaite 2002; Latimer et al. 2005; Gibson 2004; Cobban 2015), while retributive punishments are reserved for more violent offenders (Darley et al. 2000; Darley and Pittman 2003; Hood and Hoyle 2015). Evidence from criminal justice suggests that international public opinion typically favors restorative over punitive measures for youth offenders, but desire for punitive sentencing increases with the severity of the crime (Roberts and Stalans 2004). As such we expect publics to punish children and adolescents who participated in insurgent violence at a higher level than those who participated in the organization in other non-violent capacities. We test the following hypothesis:

H2 (Proportionality) People will punish children who participated in violence more severely than those who worked in other nonviolent capacities.

As a potential moderator of proportionality, we consider the severity of the alleged offense and role of personal agency and autonomy as a mechanism driving punishment preferences. We can evaluate beliefs about agency through blame attribution (Cushman 2008). We anticipate that publics attribute greater blame, and therefore favor harsher punishments, to youth they perceive as volunteer participants as opposed to those who are coerced.

Next, we turn to prospective concerns about children of insurgency. How fearful are publics going forward that these children pose a future security threat? If so, what should be done with them? We consider psychological and potentially strategic reasons for public concern about children of insurgency. The literature on exposure to war and terrorism related trauma finds strong evidence that conflict causes mental health problems for children and adolescents (Attanayake 2009; Sloan and Mann 2016; Slone et al. 2016). There are also some concerns about whether exposure to violence in childhood or adolescence leads to increased aggressive tendencies in adults (Joshi and O'Donnell 2003; Qouta et al. 2008; Hecker et al. 2015) and predisposes them to crime (Bloom 2019). Integrated threat theory would suggest that publics who feel threatened by insurgent youth could have strong reservations about releasing them back into society (Stephan and Stephan 2013). Instead, we argue that publics who feel threatened by the radicalization of insurgent children may prefer that they remain in some form of state custody or incarceration rather than remain with their parents. We test the following hypothesis:

H3 (Threat Perception): People who see children of insurgency as a future threat will oppose reintegration into society.

As a counter-hypothesis, we also consider whether publics might see a potential security dilemma in excessive long-term incarceration and alienation of insurgent youth and children from society. Research indicates that juvenile incarceration has been shown to have detrimental effects on later-life human capital while increasing criminal capital, re-incarceration and violence in adulthood (Bayer et al. 2009; Aizer and Doyle 2015). Publics may believe that retributive punishment, while potentially offering short term remedy to insurgent violence, can lead to long-

term problems due to radicalization of youth offenders, especially if they are imprisoned alongside adult insurgent and criminal counterparts. As such, people who are more favorable toward rehabilitative forms of justice through reeducation should be more supportive of keeping insurgent children out of state institutions and reintegrating them into society. We test the following hypothesis:

H4 (Rehabilitation): People who believe that insurgent children can be rehabilitated will support reintegration into society.

In summary, we seek to explain public punishment preferences for insurgent youth based on beliefs about what constitutes adulthood and perceptions regarding proportionality between crime and punishment, with harsher punishments reserved for youth who engage in violence. We anticipate that punishment preferences are also moderated by beliefs about children's agency in decision-making and the role of coercion in insurgent recruitment. Finally, we consider prospective concerns about threat perception, where those who see child insurgents as a future danger to society will be more opposed to their reintegration compared to those who are more optimistic about their rehabilitation. We now turn to our rationale for conducting this research in Mosul, Iraq.

Rationale for Case Selection

The Islamic State (ISIS) provides a compelling case for examining public views on child soldiers and children within insurgency movements more broadly. Almomhammad (2018) find that

recruitment of children in ISIS was widespread, based on broad predatory and structural methods through its bureaucracy and propaganda. In short ISIS, actively recruited children into the movement (Benotman and Malik 2016). ISIS also aggressively indoctrinated children into its ideology and tactics through formal education (Gordon 2018). As an illustration of this process, Horgan et al. (2017) identify a six-stage model of ISIS recruitment to include not only indoctrination, but selection of children for different roles based on their abilities. In addition, the lines between adult and children's roles in the organization were quite blurred, so that children often worked and fought alongside adults, with an emphasis on training young male "cubs of the caliphate" for combat (Almohammad 2018; Gordon 2018).

After ISIS was defeated in Iraq, many ISIS youth were detained and imprisoned, placed into special camps along with their families by the Iraqi military, and some have stood trial alongside adults, even though they are under 18 years of age, the legal age of adulthood under Iraqi law (Belkis 2018, Human Rights Watch 2017, 2019). Recent studies also raise concerns about the mental health and physical well-being of ISIS child soldiers in camps and detention centers in Iraq (Kizilhan 2019; Kizilhan and Kizilhan and Noll-Hussong 2018).

ISIS youth pose a challenge for both international and Iraqi law, as to whether they should be treated as victims or aggressors (Squires 2015; Guliaeva 2016; Bradley 2017; Nyamutata 2020). Though these are ultimately legal issues, we argue that public opinion is important in signaling to elites what is acceptable and unacceptable treatment of insurgent children. Public opinion is also critical to the success of transitional justice in rehabilitating ISIS insurgents and reintegrating them back into society, especially in locations, such as Mosul, where the local population endured years of ISIS rule and may be fearful and hostile to their return.

At present it is unclear how publics in Iraq view the treatment of ISIS insurgents and their supporters. Recent research by Kao and Revkin (2018) suggest that proportionality plays an important role in how publics hold ISIS insurgents accountable, punishing leadership and violent offenders more severely than those in other roles. However, they did not consider the treatment of ISIS children in their analysis. We build on their prior research to focus directly on punishment preferences for children relative to adults. We have selected Mosul, Iraq as a critical case for public opinion because ordinary Moslawis (people from Mosul) lived under ISIS rule and many former ISIS insurgents and their children will ultimately remain in this area. We now present our research design.

Research Design

Our research design consists of a cross-sectional survey and survey vignette experiments, where we examine retrospective punishment of insurgent youth as well as prospective threats posed by children of insurgency. Our survey participants are drawn from a random sample of the civilian population in Mosul, Iraq. We begin the survey with items related to perceptions of what constitutes adulthood. We ask all respondents at what age they think someone should be considered as an adult and based on what criteria to include legal, religious, developmental, and experiential rationales. We then ask respondents to indicate at what age they think those who participated in ISIS should be punished as an adult. Responses to these items provide us with a measure of the flexibility or rigidity of their threshold for adulthood when it comes to ISIS youth. To measure punishment preferences, we employ a series of instruments comparable to Kao and Revkin (2018) where we ask people how they would punish someone who worked or

fought for ISIS, with responses ranging from amnesty, short-term prison sentence, long-term imprisonment, life in prison, or the death penalty. These options are consistent with Iraqi law and have been applied to both adult and juvenile ISIS members in Iraqi courts (Taub 2018; Human Rights Watch 2019). Using a within-subject design, we then compare punishment preferences for ISIS adults and ISIS minors, controlling for the age at which subjects believe ISIS youth should be treated as adults using the following linear regression model:

$$P_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Child})_i + \beta_2(\text{Fighter})_i + \beta_3(\text{Child} \times \text{Fighter})_i + X_i + e_i$$

Here, the dependent variable, P_i , is treated as an ordinal variable for individual i 's punishment preferences ranging from amnesty to death. β_1 estimates the effect of having a child as the punishment recipient as opposed to an adult, while β_2 estimates the effect of having a fighter as opposed to someone who worked but did not fight for ISIS on punishment preferences. β_3 is the interaction term between children and fighting treatments. X_i is a vector of extended controls and individual level fixed effects. H1 predicts that children will be punished less severely than adults, as captured by β_1 . H2 predicts that child fighters will be punished more severely than non-fighters, which should appear in β_3 .

To understand the moderating effects of determinants of adulthood and agency in decision-making on punishment of children, we employ a second model, focusing exclusively on the punishment of child fighters. We predict that individuals who consider extra-legal standards of determining adulthood, who have reservations about the agency of children in making decisions for themselves, or concerns the role of coercion in child recruitment will favor lesser punishments for child fighters than those who see youth as autonomous actors.

Next we turn to prospective concerns about the threat of insurgent children (H3), their potential for rehabilitation (H4) and reintegration into society. To measure reintegration, we utilize a survey instrument that assesses whether young insurgent children (under fighting age) should be kept away from their parents in a state facility or remain with their parents. We treat this as a proxy for support for reintegration into society because the family unit is a basic foundation of social integration and placing children in a state facility effectively removes them from society. We measure threat perception by asking respondents if they think children in insurgency will pose as great a danger in the future as adults. We measure support for rehabilitation by asking respondents if they believe that radicalization can be prevented by either education programs to reverse the effects of rebel indoctrination or keeping children with their parents provided the parents pledge not to support the insurgency. We test H3 and H4 using the following model:

$$R_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Threat)_i + \beta_2(Rehabilitation)_i + X_i + e_i$$

In this model, the dependent variable R_i measure's individual i 's support for removing children from society, placing them in a state facility. Respondents who feel threatened by insurgent children (H3) should favor placing them in state detention, away from their parents and society, while respondents who are more favorable toward rehabilitation (H4) should be more opposed to state detention in favor of keeping children with their parents.

Finally, we provide additional tests regarding retrospective punishment and prospective security threat using two survey vignettes. The first examines the coercive effects of insurgent parenting for children of potential fighting age and the second examines the threat posed by

insurgent children who are well below fighting age. To explore coercion/manipulation, we utilize a punishment vignette about a 10-year-old boy who is randomized to either having fought for ISIS alongside his father or having fought, but no mention of parental involvement. We consider the father treatment as potentially coercive influence because it captures the authority and power relationship between parent and child.

Next, we introduce a vignette that involves a 4-year-old child whose father, an ISIS fighter, was killed in battle. The treatment in this vignette is whether the child is the son of a local fighter or a foreign fighter. In this case, the dependent variable measures whether the child, clearly at early stages of development and not of fighting age, is likely to become a future security threat. We assume publics who feel threatened by insurgents will see the child of the local fighter as a greater long-term threat than those of foreign fighters, because the local child will likely remain in society while the child of the foreign fighter will likely be repatriated abroad. The vignettes with randomized treatments will help isolate treatment effects that are difficult to identify with observational data. We now turn to our sampling and data collection.

Sampling and Data Collection

Conducting research in conflict and post-conflict environments is challenging for both technical as well as ethical reasons. Ethically, we must ensure the safety and well-being of our enumerators and respondents. We followed the recommendations from the APSA 2019 panel on ethical conduct of field research when designing this study.² One of the authors was in Iraq to oversee the field work for this project and all enumerators had prior experience conducting

² See the online appendix for further discussion of ethical conduct of field research.

surveys in the region, having undertaken survey research for a number of organizations. Our study received IRB approval and subjects were given consent forms prior to completing the survey. Subjects also completed the survey in a private location with the assistance of the enumerator. No adverse events were reported by either subjects or enumerators during field work. In short, we took the safety of our team very seriously in the conduct of this study, and waited until conditions in Mosul, Iraq were secure and stable to begin the research.

The technical challenges for conducting this study are myriad. First, half of Mosul was destroyed during the 2017 liberation, and population upheaval means that we do not have clear parameters from which to draw a representative sampling frame. Under these conditions, it is not possible to make population inferences from our data, because the population is presently unknown and unstable. Despite these challenges, we designed a stratified random sampling method where we divide the city into East and West Mosul, and then select neighborhoods within each part of the city as primary sampling units, probability proportion to our best estimates of post-liberation population size. Many neighborhoods remained in ruins or deserted, and there were some restrictions on where our enumerators could travel within the city. This led to oversampling of East relative to West Mosul, which incurred more destruction. Within each neighborhood, enumerators selected a random starting point, route, apartment building or dwelling, apartment unit, and used the most recent birthday as the final selection key. No more than 5 respondents were selected from a given starting point and route.

In total, 358 subjects completed our study between April 22-May 6, 2019. The response rate was estimated at approximately 35% of those contact. Respondents ranged in age from 18-61, the vast majority of which are male (93%). Males were purposefully oversampled due to challenges of female non-response common to surveys in the region (Benstead 2018). Female

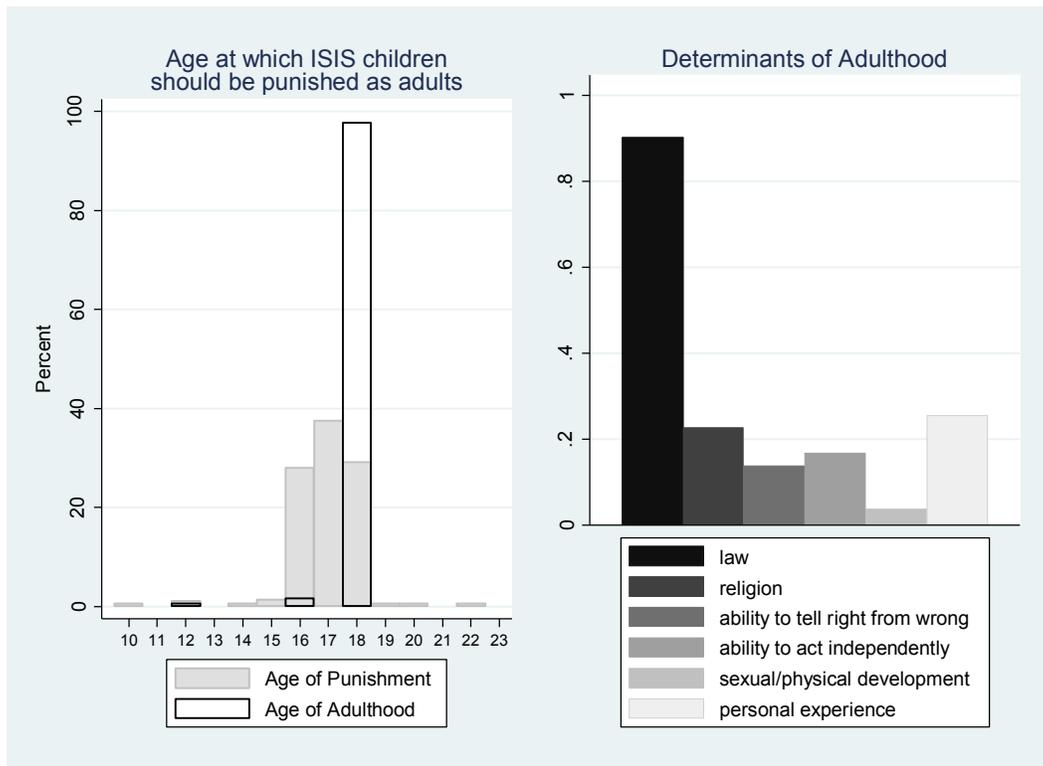
non-response is due to a combination of limited contact with females (ex. refused to open the door or make contact), a male household member refused to allow females to be interviewed, and a lack of trained female enumerators to conduct the field work relative to males. Otherwise, we have good distribution on education, income, and employment, which are summarized in Appendix Table 1. We will also show that our small female sample is sufficient for capturing some potential gender-related effects in the analysis, that can be explored in more gender balanced samples in the future.

Results

We begin by examining public views on retrospective behavior of insurgent youth. Before introducing our dependent variable on punishment preferences, we asked all subjects at what age do they consider someone to be an adult and then based on what criteria? We then asked them at what age do they think children who worked or fought for ISIS should be punished as adults? Figure 1 indicates responses to these inquiries. First, it shows that the overwhelming majority of Moslawis (97.8%) identify eighteen as the threshold age of adulthood. The most common explanation for why is based on the law (90%), which is true under Iraqi law, but a number of respondents also provided extra-legal justifications for adulthood based on religion, agency and autonomy, development, and their own experiences with minors. Finally, we reveal that many respondents think that children who worked or fought for ISIS should be punished as adults, which is actually in violation of Iraqi law. Only 30% believe the age at which ISIS children should be punished as adults must be equivalent to their own prior reported threshold of adulthood. The majority (68%) would lower the age of punishment one or more years below

their adult threshold when punishing ISIS children. We will use these items to assess the moderating effects of different thresholds and understandings of what it means to be an adult on punishment preferences. Overall, it shows that Mosul civilians are willing to bend the rules to hold children accountable for insurgent violence.

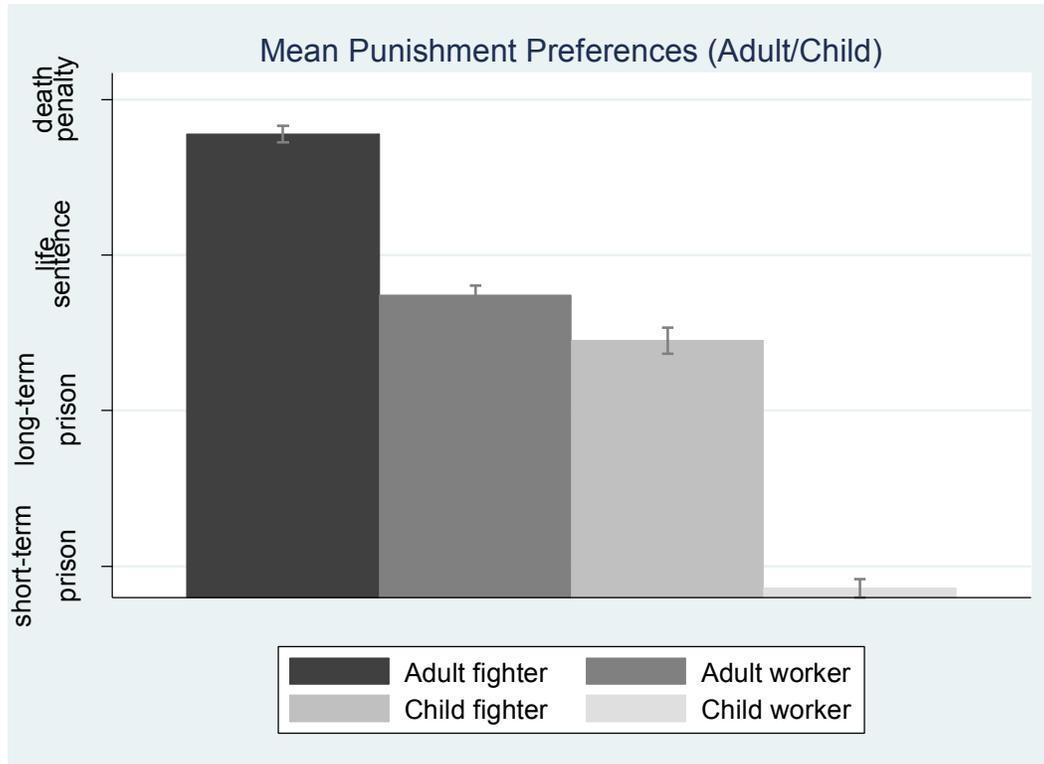
Figure 1. Determinants of Adulthood



Next, we introduce our main dependent variable on retrospective behavior: punishment preferences for children who worked or fought for ISIS. Using their own threshold for punishing ISIS children as adults as a benchmark, we then ask them what should be done with people over and under this age who worked or fought for ISIS. Response options range from amnesty, short-term imprisonment, long-term incarceration, life sentence, or the death penalty, which we treat as

an ordered variable increasing from restorative, rehabilitative understandings of justice and accountability to more harshly retributive variants. Figure 2 reports the mean responses to each of four items in the dependent variable: punishment of adult workers, adult fighters, child workers, and child fighters. Consistent with H1, it shows that publics punish adults who worked or fought for ISIS more severely than children. Consistent with H2, it shows that publics punish children who fought for ISIS more severely than those who worked but did not fight. We also see interesting interactions in punishment preferences across the adult/child and worker/fighter treatments, where children who fought for ISIS receive punishments almost comparable to adults who did not fight. In contrast, the average punishment for adult fighters is between a life sentence and the death penalty while children who worked for ISIS but did not fight, the average punishment ranges between short-term imprisonment and amnesty.

Figure 2. Mean Punishment Preferences for Adults and Children



To understand what might be driving punishment preferences, we turn to regression models. Table 1 reports the results of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression where the dependent variable ranges from 1 = amnesty to 5 = death sentence. Model 1 reports the basic treatment effects of punishment for children vs. adults, fighters vs. workers, and an interaction term between the two, while Model 2 includes extended controls. Since this is a within-subject design, there are four observations for each individual, bringing the total N from 357 to 1427. We control for individual fixed effects in both models. Models 1-2 confirm that adults are punished more severely than children, consistent with H1; fighters are punished more severely than non-fighters; and the interaction term shows that child fighters are punished more severely than child workers, consistent with H2. Adult workers are the reference category in the constant comparison term. In Model 2, we add additional extended controls and find that females are less

punitive than males, but other controls do not reach $p < 0.05$ standard of significance. Hence, even with a small female sample, we find a gender effect on punishment preferences, which should be explored in greater detail in future research with a larger female sample. Punishment preferences are not dependent on the age threshold of adulthood, however.

Table 1. Punishment Preferences for Adults and Children (OLS regression)

VARIABLES	(1) punishment	(2) punishment	(3) punishment child fighters
Fighter txt	1.040*** (0.0383)	1.040*** (0.0385)	
Child txt	-1.885*** (0.0378)	-1.885*** (0.0380)	
Child x Fighter	0.554*** (0.0464)	0.554*** (0.0466)	
Agency and autonomy			0.231*** (0.0725)
Coercion			-0.147*** (0.0520)
Extra-legal determinant of adulthood			-0.470*** (0.141)
Age of adult punishment for ISIS		0.0499 (0.0316)	0.0386 (0.0442)
female		-0.235*** (0.0909)	-0.233 (0.156)
age		-0.00125 (0.00220)	-0.00236 (0.00531)
education		0.0253 (0.0200)	0.00616 (0.0475)
professional		-0.0427 (0.0563)	-0.0814 (0.133)
laborer		0.0286 (0.0528)	0.00965 (0.108)
unemployed		0.0945 (0.0584)	0.0528 (0.157)
income		-0.00396 (0.0167)	-0.0906** (0.0417)
Religion_Shia		-0.0472	-0.273

		(0.0741)	(0.168)
Religion_Christian		0.0540	0.168
		(0.0977)	(0.267)
Religion_other		-0.0561	-0.0924
		(0.0632)	(0.250)
Ethnicity_Kurd		0.115*	0.305*
		(0.0660)	(0.160)
Ethnicity_Turkmen		0.102*	0.100
		(0.0558)	(0.150)
Ethnicity_other		-0.0208	-0.177
		(0.103)	(0.180)
Constant	3.742***	2.858***	2.749***
	(0.0321)	(0.554)	(0.783)
Observations	1,427	1,427	357
# of FE groups	357	357	
R-squared			0.131
adj.r2	0.733	0.739	0.0878

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To better understand preferences driving punishment of children, in Model 3 we focus on the punishment of child fighters, using the same dependent variable but excluding the other reference categories (adult worker, fighter, child worker) from Models 1-2. To measure agency and autonomy, we ask respondents how strongly they agree that children in ISIS played an important role in supporting ISIS fighting. To measure coercion, we ask respondents whether they agree that children who were forced to fight for ISIS should not be punished. Finally, we consider the role of legal vs. extra-legal conceptualization of what it means to be an adult, using an additive index which increases with the number of extra-legal understandings of adulthood offered (religion, agency, autonomy, development, experience).³ In all cases, we find moderating effects on the punishment of child fighters. Beliefs about the agency of children increases punishment, while concerns about coercion and extra-legal understandings of adulthood decrease

³ See Appendix Table 1 for coding details.

punishment. Overall, there appear to be conditions under which Mosul civilians are willing to punish children who fought for ISIS that are consistent with our theoretical predictions. We also note that the control for female respondents is no longer significant in this model when factoring in other potential moderators. There is, however, a significant effect of income on harsher punishment, offering potential evidence of a class divide in ISIS support. However, we refrain here from the language of causal mediation because we cannot make explicit causal claims from these observational data.

Next, we turn to our prospective hypotheses about the future threats posed by children of insurgency. To assess prospects for reintegration, we first employ a dependent variable where respondents are asked to whether they believe ISIS children would be better off in a state-run facility than with their parents to prevent their future radicalization. We argue that this is a reasonable proxy for reintegration since it involves breaking up a family unity and removing children from the influence of their parents and social networks. We find that respondents are divided on this question with 58% agreeing or strongly agreeing that putting ISIS children in a state-run facility would reduce radicalization and 42% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

To evaluate H3, we measure perceptions of security threat by asking how strongly respondents agree that children in ISIS could be just as dangerous as adults in the future. Nearly 97% strongly or somewhat agreed that this was a concern. To evaluate H4, we use two measures of rehabilitation, one focusing on rehabilitation of ISIS parents and the other on children. First, we ask whether respondents agree that, to prevent children from becoming radicalized, they should remain with their parents if the parents pledged not to support ISIS. Respondents are again divided here with 55% agreeing that this could prevent future radicalization and 45% disagreeing. Next, we ask respondents whether they agree that children should be placed in an

education program to reduce the effects of ISIS indoctrination. Nearly 95% strongly or somewhat agree that this is needed to reduce future radicalization.

Table 2 below reports the results of OLS regression on our dependent variable. Model 1 indicates, consistent with H3, that subjects who are fearful of the dangers posed by ISIS children are more likely to favor keeping them in a state-run facility rather than remain in society with their parents. Consistent with H4, Model 1 shows that subjects who believe that radicalization could be reduced through parental and child rehabilitation are less favorable toward removing children from the family unit and society. Hence, while the public sees a potential security threat posed by ISIS children, they appear divided in terms of how best to approach the problem.

As an additional robustness check on our results, we utilize two survey vignettes as independent variables measuring punishment preferences and threat perception. The first is a punishment vignette involving a 10-year old boy. In one randomized variant, he is fighting alongside his father. In the other, he is fighting alone. In Appendix Figure 1, we report the average treatment effects showing that subjects are more punitive toward a child fighting alone than with his father. We interpret this as further evidence that coercion drives down punishment preferences. Mean punishment preferences were consistent with short-term imprisonment in the child+father treatment and long-term imprisonment in the child only treatment.

If subjects are concerned about the future threat posed to society by this child, then punishment preferences in the fighter vignette should correlate with support for keeping children under state control, since imprisonment is an extreme form of institutional detention. In Model 2 we run the interaction between punishment and treatments to show that, consistent with H3, those who seek harsher punishments for children in both treatment groups are more likely to agree that insurgent children should be transferred over to the state rather than remain with their

parents. Hence, the vignette provides another measure of the relationship between child-related threat perceptions, punishment preferences, and opposition to reintegration.

Finally, we examine a vignette involving a 4-year-old child whose father has been killed while fighting for ISIS.⁴ The purpose of this vignette was to assess the long-term threat posed by children of ISIS fighters. The key treatment in the vignette is whether the child's father is a foreign fighter, in which case, the child is likely to be repatriated to his father's country of origin, or the child of a local fighter, in which case, he is likely to remain in Mosul. In Appendix Figure 1, we show that subjects feel more threatened by the child of a local as opposed to foreign fighter, as measured by an index of three post-vignette items. These results are consistent with concerns about long-term threats posed by children of local fighters.

In Model 3, we run interaction terms (*Threat x Child Foreign/Local Fighter*) between a post-treatment index of the first three threat perception items in Appendix Figure 1 and the two treatment groups. It shows that subjects who feel more threatened by the 4-year old child becoming radicalized are more favorable toward transferring the control of the child to the state. This is also consistent with H3. However, in the final post-treatment item in Appendix Figure 1, many Moslawis oppose punishing a four-year-old child for his father's crimes and there is no treatment effect on this item. In model 4 we run interaction terms between this post-treatment item and treatment groups (*No Threat x Child Foreign/Local Fighter*) to show that those who feel strongly that the child should not be punished for his father's crimes are more likely to oppose transferring him over to the state. We believe this result is consistent with H4 on the rehabilitative potential of the child. Overall, these results underscore the divisions in Mosul over

⁴ See online appendix for survey vignette wording for both vignettes.

the long-term threat versus rehabilitative potential of insurgent children, especially those who are well below the age of fighting and in earliest stages of cognitive development.

Table 2. Prospects for Reintegration into Society (OLS Regression)

VARIABLES	(1) State Control	(2) State Control	(3) State Control	(4) State Control
Threat Perception	0.249*** (0.0881)	0.236*** (0.0879)	0.203** (0.0822)	0.250*** (0.0862)
Rehabilitation Parents	-0.189*** (0.0724)	-0.0906 (0.0780)	-0.0992 (0.0728)	-0.196*** (0.0716)
Rehabilitation Child	-0.180** (0.0851)	-0.276*** (0.0854)	-0.182** (0.0801)	-0.153* (0.0906)
female	0.281 (0.175)	0.253 (0.180)	0.214 (0.153)	0.233 (0.179)
age	-0.00323 (0.00634)	-0.00568 (0.00610)	-0.00169 (0.00559)	-0.00345 (0.00625)
education	0.0673 (0.0554)	0.0662 (0.0546)	0.0411 (0.0491)	0.0655 (0.0535)
professional	-0.00484 (0.165)	-0.0146 (0.160)	0.0171 (0.153)	0.00845 (0.163)
laborer	-0.0371 (0.128)	-0.00897 (0.125)	0.0450 (0.118)	-0.0370 (0.128)
unemployed	0.322** (0.162)	0.345** (0.158)	0.351** (0.141)	0.285* (0.160)
income	0.134*** (0.0464)	0.0922** (0.0468)	0.0585 (0.0444)	0.110** (0.0475)
Religion_Shia	-0.120 (0.211)	-0.184 (0.205)	-0.0640 (0.200)	-0.138 (0.209)
Religion_Christian	-0.384 (0.263)	-0.277 (0.276)	-0.379 (0.286)	-0.386 (0.260)
Religion_other	-0.563 (0.426)	-0.458 (0.465)	-0.335 (0.305)	-0.368 (0.437)
Ethnicity_Kurd	-0.189 (0.164)	-0.207 (0.168)	-0.164 (0.149)	-0.215 (0.164)
Ethnicity_Turkmen	0.208 (0.191)	0.134 (0.190)	0.188 (0.156)	0.207 (0.197)
Ethnicity_other	0.325 (0.268)	0.355 (0.253)	0.246 (0.243)	0.349 (0.280)
Punish x Child+Father		0.157** (0.0710)		

Punish x Child Alone		0.210*** (0.0538)		
Threat x Child Foreign Fighter			0.588*** (0.0847)	
Threat x Child Local Fighter			0.549*** (0.0630)	
No Threat x Child Foreign Fighter				-0.222** (0.0932)
No Threat x Child Local Fighter				-0.163* (0.0955)
Constant	2.655*** (0.566)	2.411*** (0.614)	1.555*** (0.558)	3.349*** (0.613)
Observations	357	357	357	357
R-squared	0.151	0.189	0.303	0.171
adj. r2	0.111	0.146	0.266	0.127

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

In summary, we find support for our two hypotheses on retrospective punishment of insurgent children. Subjects will punish adults more severely than children, but they hold children who commit acts of violence to a higher standard of accountability than children who did not engage in violence. We find that punishment of child soldiers is moderated by what standards subjects use to determine thresholds of adulthood and perceptions of a child's agency and autonomy relative to coercive participation in insurgency violence. We also find support for our two hypotheses about the prospective threats posed by children of insurgency. People who see insurgent children as a future threat are more opposed to reintegrating them into society, preferring that they be transferred into state care and custody. However, those who see greater prospects for child rehabilitation are more in favor of keeping them with their parents, provided the parents signal a commitment to ending their involvement in the insurgency and the children can receive rehabilitation to reverse the effects of indoctrination.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our results expand on the research community's general theoretical understanding of public opinion with respect to child soldiers and children of insurgency more broadly. We examine public support for rehabilitation and reintegration of former insurgent youth vis-à-vis retributive punishment. In answer to Wordsworth's query, we find a divided public in Iraq. Those who feel more threatened by radicalization of insurgent youth are opposed to reintegration, preferring incarceration and other punitive measures. Those who are more optimistic about the prospects of restorative justice, see a path for those children to reintegrate into society. These findings speak to broad concerns about insurgent youth and child soldiering identified in the literature, but reveal divisions in terms of strategies for how to approach preventing future radicalization and security threats.

We also find that beliefs about the determinants of adulthood and whether participation in violence is voluntary or coercive help moderate the public's willingness to sanction child soldiers. Positive beliefs about the prospects for rehabilitation also increase public support for the reintegration of insurgent children into society. We would anticipate these findings to be generalizable beyond Iraq, and could point to ways to encourage more restorative approaches to justice for insurgent youth.

Finally, a great deal of research in criminology underscores the detrimental consequences of long-term incarceration of minors for later-life mental health and violent criminal behavior. Penalization at a young age leads to heightened aggression, increased recidivism, and the expansion of criminal capital at the expense of human capital. If reintegration is desirable, retributive justice is most likely counterproductive to that outcome. Removing insurgent youth

from society through confinement or incarceration in state institutions most likely exacerbates the problems of radicalization, undermining long-term security goals. At the same time, reintegration requires not only commitment from the state to provide children with needed resources to heal from their trauma, but also a willingness by the public to receive them back into society. Rehabilitation will not lead to reintegration if children of insurgency remain stigmatized by their past. In supporting rehabilitation and reintegration, the public can play an important role in breaking cycles of insurgent violence.

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Appendix

Table 1. Summary of Variables

Variable	Description	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Punish child fighter	Punishment preferences for child fighter 1 = amnesty to 5 =death penalty	357	3.45	0.80	1	5
Punish child	Punishment preferences for child	357	1.86	0.57	1	4

worker	worker 1 = amnesty to 5 =death penalty					
Punish adult fighter	Punishment preferences for adult fighter 1 = amnesty to 5 =death penalty	357	4.78	0.52	2	5
Punish adult worker	Punishment preferences for adult worker 1 = amnesty to 5 =death penalty	356	3.74	0.61	2	5
Age of punishment	Age at which someone in ISIS should be punished as an adult	357	16.93	1.20	10	22
Extra-legal determinant of adulthood	Index for extra-legal determinants of adulthood based on religion, agency, development, experience	357	0.06	0.20	-4	.6
Agency and autonomy	“ISIS Children played an important role in supporting ISIS fighters” 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree	357	3.31	0.61	1	4
Coercion	“Children who were forced to fight for ISIS should not be punished” 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree	357	2.84	0.87	1	4
State control	To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following would prevent children of ISIS from one day becoming radicalized? “They would be better off in a state-run facility than with their parents.” 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree	357	2.85	0.95	1	4
Threat perception	“Children in ISIS could be just as dangerous as adults in the future” 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree	357	3.57	0.57	1	4
Rehabilitation Parents	To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following would prevent children of ISIS from one day becoming radicalized? “They would be better off with their parents if their parents pledge not to support ISIS.” 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree.	357	2.61	0.74	1	4
Rehabilitation Child	To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following would prevent children of ISIS from one day becoming radicalized? “They should be placed in some	357	3.49	0.61	1	4

	education program to reverse the effects of ISIS indoctrination.” 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree					
Punish x child + father txt	Survey vignette: punishment preferences for child+fighter treatment. 1 = amnesty to 5 = death penalty	212	2.75	0.68	2	4
Punish x child txt	Survey vignette: punishment preferences for child+fighter treatment. 1 = amnesty to 5 = death penalty	145	3.37	1.12	2	5
Threat x Child Foreign Fighter	Survey vignette: threat perception index for child of foreign fighter treatment. 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree	212	1.91	0.58	1	3
Threat x Child Local Fighter	Survey vignette: threat perception index for child of local fighter treatment. 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree	145	2.39	0.79	1	4
No Threat x Child Foreign Fighter	Survey vignette: 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree. “He is only a child and should not be punished for his father’s crimes.”	212	3.49	0.57	1	4
No Threat x Child Local Fighter	Survey vignette: 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree. “He is only a child and should not be punished for his father’s crimes.”	145	3.62	0.50	2	4
female	1 = female respondent	358	0.08	0.26	0	1
age	Subject age in years	358	29.56	8.86	18	61
education	Education from 1 = no formal education to 4 = higher	358	2.93	1.01	1	4
income	Income assessment ranges from 1 = Significant difficulties to 4 = cover expenses and save	358	2.26	1.05	1	4
Professional	1 = employer, manager, professional office worker	358	0.20	0.40	0	1
Laborer	1 = manual worker, farmer	358	0.40	0.49	0	1
Unemployed	1 = currently unemployed	358	0.09	0.29	0	1
Sunni	Religion Sunni %	358	87.7			
Shia	Religion Shia %	358	8.4			
Christian	Religion Christian %	358	2.5			
Other-rel	Religion Other %	358	1.4			
Arab	Ethnicity Arab %	358	77.9			
Kurd	Ethnicity Kurd %	358	9.8			
Turkmen	Ethnicity Turkmen %	358	8.9			

Figure 1. Average Treatment Effects for Child Survey Vignettes from Table 2

