



The Low Likelihood of ISIS Resurgence in Iraq

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ICCT Policy Brief

May 2024



International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism

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Abstract

ISIS was militarily defeated and lost territorial control in Iraq over six years ago. Since then, the group has struggled to mobilise support and restore its influence. This Policy Brief examines the contextual shifts in Iraq since 2017 that have hindered ISIS's ability to radicalise and recruit, addressing the critical question: why is a resurgence of ISIS in Iraq unlikely? Drawing on field observations and previous research, this Policy Brief carefully argues that the decreasing prevalence of sectarian grievances, particularly among Iraqi youth, diminishes the potential for community support for ISIS and other forms of violent extremism compared to the post-2003 period.

To substantiate this argument, the Brief analyses the decline of sectarian demands that once contributed to the emergence of violent extremist groups in Iraq. It also revisits the primary drivers of radicalisation in the pre-2014 period that facilitated ISIS's rise and explores how post-Caliphate developments, including demographic changes, have altered people's needs and concerns, diverging from the narratives ISIS previously used to attract recruits.

Keywords: ISIS, violent extremism, Iraq, sectarianism, reintegration, rehabilitation, and education

Introduction

Following the military defeat of ISIS in Iraq in the summer of 2017, ISIS militants have engaged in numerous attacks against Iraqi security forces, Kurdish security forces, and civilians across various regions.¹ According to the US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism for 2022, Iraq was a primary hub for ISIS activities, totalling 321 reported incidents.² However, since then, the number of incidents has decreased, and Iraq is no longer among the most active country locations for ISIS. Additionally, Iraq is no longer among the top ten countries most impacted by terrorism, with total deaths falling by 65 percent in 2023.³ ISIS militants have been unsuccessful in garnering widespread community support for their activities in Iraq, even in areas that were under their rule between 2014 and 2017. This drop-in support for the group is of great interest to those focused on the security of Iraq.

Following the fall of ISIS in Iraq, during the summer of 2023, the author conducted interviews with families of individuals associated with the Islamic State (ISIS) militants at the Iraqi al-Jada'a Rehabilitation Centre in Nineveh's district of Qayyarah.⁴ The centre accommodates Iraqis returning from Syria's al-Hol camp. Among several noteworthy observations, we found that the primary grievances among these individuals, both upon their return from al-Hol and in anticipation of returning to their areas of origin, pertained primarily to individual concerns related to services rather than ideological,⁵ revenge, sectarian, or communal-related factors.⁶ This trend is reflective of a broader shift observed across various communities in Iraq, transitioning from deeply entrenched ethno-sectarian grievances to issues centred around socio-economic conditions and governance in recent years.⁷ This shift serves as a defence against the emergence of violent extremism, particularly the type of violent extremism that had the capacity to radicalise tens of thousands in Iraq post-2003.

This Policy Brief aims to analyse the contextual shifts in Iraq since 2017 that have constrained ISIS's ability to radicalise and mobilise people in order to find an answer to the main question: why is a resurgence of ISIS in Iraq unlikely? Specifically, it focuses on the decline of ethno-sectarian narratives,⁸ which previously functioned as a primary catalyst for the emergence of violent extremist groups in Iraq. To get a better understanding of how these narratives are shifting, this Policy Brief first revisits the main drivers that played a role in the radicalisation processes in the pre-2014 period that led to the rise of ISIS. Next, it will focus on how the post-Caliphate developments, including the demographic changes, have shifted peoples' needs and concerns and how they divert from the main narrative used by ISIS to recruit people. In the concluding section, the challenges that still remain in Iraq are highlighted, and four key recommendations highlighted, which will aim to strengthen resilience in Iraq to invest in long-term conflict transformation and conflict prevention.

1 See: Kurdistan24, "ISIS attack in Kirkuk kills Iraqi soldier," 29 March 2024, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/34437-ISIS-attack-in-Kirkuk-kills-Iraqi-soldier>

2 See: US Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2022". <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2022/>

3 Institute for Economics & Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2024". <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>

4 This fieldwork was conducted as part of the IOM PVE Programme in Iraq, which included a comprehensive survey involving over 100 residents of al-Jada'a Centre. It is important to clarify that this observation reflects my personal perspective and not the official research stance of the IOM PVE project in Iraq.

5 Abadi, Houda, "Research Summary Paper: Rehabilitation Emerging Practices in Muslim Majority Countries," 2023. <https://www.transformativepeace.com/post/research-summary-paper-rehabilitation-of-emerging-practices-in-muslim-majority-countries>

6 Social Inquiry, "'Ideas are More Dangerous than Deeds': Street-level Perspectives of Violent Extremism in Ninewa Governorate, Iraq", 2018: pp. 8-9.

7 Jabar, A Faelh, "The Iraqi Protest Movement: From Identity Politics to Issue Politics," *LSE Middle East Centre*, 2018.

8 See Halawa, Hafsa, "Iraq's Tishreen Movement: A Decade of Protests and Mobilisation," *IAI*, 21/26 June 2021.

Contextualising ISIS within the Post-2003 Regime Change in Iraq

Before 2014 and the Rise of ISIS

Several studies underscore various reasons for the rise of violent extremism in Iraq, specifically in Sunni-majority regions, between 2003 and 2014. These factors included a sense of exclusion from the country's new authorities and political system, the perceived "Shia-fiction" of their territories, the imposition of harsh anti-terrorism laws, and the presence of security forces originating from outside these regions.⁹ Central to these grievances and challenges was the deep-seated sectarian divide between Shia and Sunni communities in Iraq. This period in Iraq's political discourse is referred to as "*ayam al-taefia*" (the sectarian days). Key provinces such as Nineveh, Anbar, and Salahadin bore the brunt of these sentiments.

In general, Sunnis harboured resentment towards the new political order established after 2003, which saw Shia and Kurdish parties dominate Iraq's government while Sunni representatives associated with the previous regime were sidelined. The ousting of the former regime in 2003 precipitated widespread anti-government sectarian violence across the country, notably in Baghdad and Sunni-majority provinces. This period witnessed a surge in sectarian killings, kidnappings, insurgency, terrorism, and militia violence.¹⁰ Violent extremist factions, including al-Qaeda, targeted Sunnis, who collaborated with the new authorities alongside US forces. The dissolution of the former security and military apparatus resulted in governmental paralysis and spurred waves of Sunni protests. Consequently, major Sunni political parties boycotted the post-2003 political processes, including the 2005 Iraqi parliamentary elections and the 2005 referendum, which voted on the constitution.¹¹ In subsequent years, particularly in 2012 and 2013, several protests occurred in Sunni-majority areas, where protestors encountered violence and intimidation and were forcefully quelled by the Iraq security forces. These events collectively hindered national reconciliation efforts and fostered an environment conducive to violent extremism.

After the 2017 Defeat of ISIS in Iraq

The post-2003 system in Iraq revolves around a power-sharing arrangement among the country's three largest ethno-sectarian groups: Shia Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds. As per this informal agreement, the Prime Minister's post is reserved for a member of the Shia community, the Parliamentary Speaker must be a Sunni, and the President – a Kurd. While this system remains intact, there has been a notable shift in the demands of people in recent years. The predominant focus, specifically for the people of Iraq, has transitioned from ethno-sectarian divisions to the challenges associated with governance.¹² Formerly perceived as supportive of, or vulnerable to, violent extremism, Sunni Arab communities are now voicing concerns that extend beyond sectarian lines.¹³ While discontent exists among some within Sunni-majority areas regarding the presence of Shia militias hindering their return or the normalisation of their

9 See: Program on Extremism, "Mosul and the Islamic State", 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/mosul-and-the-islamic-state> ; Social Inquiry, "Ideas are More Dangerous than Deeds"; Middle East Research Institute, "The Christians: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict," *Erbil: Middle East Research Institute*, 2017; Middle East Research Institute, "The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict," *Erbil: Middle East Research Institute*, 2017.

10 Rifaat, Karar and Kamaran Palani, "Preventing Violent Extremism in Nineveh", *Un Ponte Per*, 2021: p. 16. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372855145_Preventing_Violent_Extremism_in_Nineveh

11 Ibid.

12 Palani, Kamaran, "Iraqi Shia Islamist Parties' Response to the Protest Movement", *Al Sharq Strategic Research*. 2020; Dodge, Toby, and Renad Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-sectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2020): 58-69.

13 Sen, Ashish Kumar, "Unemployment Replaces ISIS as Top Security Concern for Minorities in Iraq", *United State Institute of Peace*. 2021. [https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/06/unemployment-replaces-isis-top-security-concern-minorities-iraq#:~:text=Today%2C%20more%20than%20three%20years,United%20States%20Institute%20of%20Peace.](https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/06/unemployment-replaces-isis-top-security-concern-minorities-iraq#:~:text=Today%2C%20more%20than%20three%20years,United%20States%20Institute%20of%20Peace.;); Jabar, "The Iraqi Protest Movement."

regions, for example, in Anbar, Diyala, and Salahaddin, most Sunnis frame their demands around governance, reconstruction, services, and socio-economic well-being. This situation is no longer characterised solely by Sunni discontent against Shia influence or Sunni “resistance” against the “the US occupation”.

When protests take place in Shia or Shia-majority regions, they are typically led by Shia constituents and target Shia political entities, exemplified by the 2019 Tishreen Movement.¹⁴ Likewise, in Kurdistan, grievances are directed at Kurdish authorities, as evidenced by ongoing protests by public servants over salary delays in recent years.¹⁵ These shifts in the framing and nature of demands do not result from well-planned government policies but rather stem from people’s disillusionment and frustration with elites and political parties purporting to represent them. Disappointment with authorities may not necessarily serve as a robust deterrent against violent extremism in Iraq; however, it has helped to erode the sectarian narrative that entities like ISIS and other extremist organisations exploited between 2003 and 2017.

Another significant factor is the demographic shift in Iraq’s population. Approximately 40 percent of the population is younger than 15, and 60 percent of the 43 million inhabitants are under the age of 25. This demographic composition means that a majority of Iraqis have no direct personal recollection of the previous Ba’athist regime. My co-authored research report, which centred on post-ISIS peace-building in Mosul, adopted a mixed methods approach, including 109 interviews, eight focus group discussions, and a survey involving 205 participants. Our findings indicated a notable shift among youth in interpreting peace and conflict dynamics.¹⁶ While ethno-religious identity continues to play a role in self-identification processes across Iraq, Iraqi youth increasingly interpret peace and conflict dynamics through social, political, and economic factors rather than identity-related issues.¹⁷

Research findings in the field of displacement and return following the emergence of ISIS in 2014 also underscored a recurring theme: the profound impact of displacement and individuals’ experiences with destruction on their lives.¹⁸ Specifically, exposure to new lives in displacement areas has had a notable effect. People from regions like Anbar, Salahaddin, Telafar, Hawija, Diyala, Shingal, and other cities, particularly their rural areas, often express that their displacement experience has heightened awareness about education, women’s rights, and increased participation in civil society within their communities.¹⁹ It is essential to clarify that the argument here is not to assert that the war against ISIS has positive impacts on Iraqi communities. Rather, the focus is on how the scale of destruction and displacement has changed people’s perceptions of their lives and other communities, thereby diminishing the space for violent extremist organisations to exploit communal divisions.

Unravelling Collective Motivation

Between 2020 and 2023, the author participated in three research endeavours examining the factors motivating Iraqis to embrace violent extremism post-2003, notably ISIS. These investigations were undertaken in collaboration with the Middle East Research Institute,²⁰ Un

14 International Crisis Group, “Iraq’s Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box”, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/223-iraqs-tishreen-uprising-barricades-ballot-box>; Costantini, Irene. “The Iraqi protest movement: social mobilisation amidst violence and instability.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 5 (2021): 832-849.

15 Fazil, Shivan, and Megan Connelly, “Civil disobedience and lawfare: Protest movement and contentious politics in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq”, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 23, no. 3 (2023): 314-335.

16 Rifaat, Karar, and Kamaran Palani, “Youth Identity and Activism before and after the So-called Islamic State in Nineveh”, *Un Ponte Per*, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372854711_Youth_Identity_and_Activism_before_and_after_the_So-called_Islamic_State_in_Nineveh

17 Rifaat and Palani, “Youth Identity.”

18 Johansen, Henriette, Kamaran Palani, and Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-Analysis of Existing Studies and Literature”, *USIP*, April 2020, p. 15.

19 Johansen, Palani and Ala’Aldeen, “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa.”

20 In this study, we utilised a mixed-methods approach, surveying 287 individuals in Nineveh (121) and the Kurdistan Region (166) between July

Ponte Per²¹ and the International Organization for Migration.²² The main empirical observations underscored the influence of family and communal dynamics on the support for, and involvement in, violent extremist organisations. The decision of individuals to join ISIS often transcended their individual motivations and was predominantly influenced by collective grievances.

My previous qualitative data and observations highlighted central themes such as “our entire family”, “our entire village”, “our entire tribe” and “our extensive and large family”. It was notable that responses such as “many in my neighbourhood”, “my elder brothers” or “my uncles” joined ISIS, and “we followed them” were common. In emphasising these arguments and observations, the discussion does not downplay the acknowledged power of ideology or other well-studied push factors, such as unemployment, as commonly discussed in the literature on the drivers of violent extremism. Rather, it underscores that ISIS could not attract such large numbers of individuals in Iraq without the presence of strong pre-existing communal grievances and associations with others who joined the group.

Moreover, the loss of family members to ISIS within the al-Hol camp has cultivated adverse perceptions of ISIS among certain al-Jada’a residents. This, in turn, serves to undermine ISIS mobilisation and its narrative not only among returnees but also within other vulnerable groups. Many families from al-Hol and now in al-Jada’a experienced the loss of family members at the hands of ISIS affiliates inside al-Hol camp for various reasons, as indicated by my interactions with these individuals. This has not only led to intra-familial divisions but also resulted in diverse perspectives regarding ISIS.

Persisting Challenges

Challenges persist in addressing the root causes that previously facilitated violent extremism in Iraq. Although ethno-sectarian divisions have weakened, they still endure.²³ Moreover, Iraq continues to grapple with rampant corruption, lacking sufficient accountability mechanisms.²⁴ The country is also susceptible to the impacts of climate change.²⁵ These factors collectively can threaten the resilience of communities against various forms of violent extremism. Notably, two of the most pressing challenges at present involve the continued presence of militias in areas liberated from ISIS and the complex political dynamics surrounding counter-terrorism efforts.

Shia Militias in Sunni-Majority Areas

Despite the earlier assertion that ISIS lacks a robust communal support system in post-2017 Iraq, there are still challenges that persist, which stem from groups that consider ethno-sectarian divisions crucial for their viability. In areas reclaimed from ISIS, Iraqi Shia militias such as the Badir Organisation, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, and Kataib Hezbollah have assumed pivotal roles not only in the security sector but have also deeply infiltrated post-ISIS reconstruction, governance, and local administration.²⁶ These militias obstruct the return and repatriation of specific displaced

and August 2021. The survey also focused on individuals formerly engaged in organized activities within the definition of VE but now inactive. See: Ala’Aldeen, Dlawer, Palani, Kamaran, and Khogir Wirya, “Violent Extremism in Mosul & the Kurdistan Region: Context, Drivers, and Public Perception.” Erbil: Middle East Research Institute. 2022.

21 As a Leading Peace-Building Researcher, I spearheaded a project for Un Ponte Per in 2021, which resulted in the production of five comprehensive reports addressing topics such as the prevention of violent extremism in Iraq. This initiative was part of the Ninewa Return Program implemented by Malteser International and funded by The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany.

22 Between 2022 and 2023, I served as a PVE Research Advisor at IOM, Iraq office. Alongside conducting research and contributing to local action plans aimed at preventing violent extremism, I participated in significant meetings with both local and national authorities, addressing these delicate matters.

23 Khedir, Hewa Haji, “Not to mislead peace: on the demise of identity politics in Iraq”, *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 5 (2022): 1137-1155.

24 Jiyad, Sajad, “Corruption is the lifeblood of politics in Iraq (PeaceRep report)”, *Middle East Centre*, London School of Economics. 2023; Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index”. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/irq>

25 IOM, “Migration, Environment, and Climate Change in Iraq”, 2022. <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11411/files/documents/Migration%20Environment%20and%20Climate%20Change%20in%20Iraq.pdf>

26 Palani, Kamaran, “Iran-backed PMFs are destabilising Iraq’s disputed regions”, *Al Jazeera*, 8 May 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/>

populations, particularly those returning from al-Hol and those currently residing in al Jada'a, to their original regions, notably in Diyala, Anbar, and Salahadin.²⁷ The security landscape in territories liberated from ISIS is complex, necessitating tailored contextual analyses for each region due to the diverse composition of armed factions and the identities of their members. For example, in Nineveh's district of Hamdaniah, Telkaif and Bashiqa, Iraqi Shia militias set up the 30th Brigade, predominantly comprised of members from the Shabak community. Additionally, they created the 50th Brigade specifically for Christians in the Hamdaniah district.²⁸ In each area, the dynamics of the return of individuals from either al-Hol or currently residing in al-Jada'a are unique and evolve consistently.

An illustration of the sectarian narrative employed by the Shia armed groups is evident in the virtual realm. Iraqi X (formerly Twitter) spaces have become saturated with daily trends and hashtags generated by thousands of accounts affiliated with these militias. In Iraqi political vocabulary, this phenomenon is known as "the electronic army." These accounts disseminate content that seeks to rationalise the existence of these groups that often have an underlying sectarian nature. Their sustainability strategy centres around fomenting internal strife with Iraqi groups, such as Sunnis or Kurds, and external tensions with the United States and other actors. The perpetuation of fear and the promotion of an armed populace constitute their primary narrative, presenting a potential threat to the communal resilience explained above. As for why these groups adopt such discourses, it is because they rely on conflicts to sustain and legitimise their presence. Without conflicts, their existence would be called into question.

The Politics of Fighting Terrorism

Iraq has benefited from the presence and support of the Global Coalition against ISIS, but the presence of international organisations has become a subject of contention and dispute within the broader rivalry between the US and Iran. Different parties forming the current Iraqi government hold varying perspectives on whether Iraq still requires the support of the international coalition. The continuation of these power rivalries within Iraqi soil might decrease the effectiveness of Iraqi security forces in fighting the remnants of ISIS. An additional challenge lies in the potential strategic interest of existing Iraqi official security forces, including the Kurdish forces, in maintaining a weakened but persisting ISIS. Iran-backed militias have employed the pretext or justification of the ISIS threat to preserve their existence and prolong their state of exception. For these forces, this might align with their goals of sustaining local relevance and mobilising public support by invoking the threat of terrorism when necessary. Although providing concrete evidence for this argument is challenging, anecdotal reports from villagers and residents in areas with past ISIS activities suggest a de facto engagement with ISIS on the ground, indicating a lingering space for its survival.

Conclusion

The crux of the argument in this Policy Brief is not to signify the end of sectarianism or to downplay the immediate threat of the ISIS resurgence or violent extremism in general in Iraq, but to underscore the imperative for a paradigm shift in both narrative and the approach to programming interventions. Proposed adjustments to PVE programming in Iraq, based on empirical observations analysed in this Brief, should encompass the following four key programming interventions.

opinions/2021/5/8/iran-backed-pmfs-are-destabilising-iraqs-disputed-regions

²⁷ It is essential to acknowledge that hindrances to the return and repatriation of individuals stem not only from the presence of these groups but also from tribal and intra-communal disputes. See: Sandi, Ouafae, "Affiliated with ISIS: Challenges for the return and reintegration of women and children", *UNDP*, October 2022. <https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/affiliated-isis-challenges-return-and-reintegration-women-and-children>

²⁸ Palani, "Iran-backed PMFs".

Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programmes

The persistent challenges outlined in the previous section necessitate proactive measures to prevent the emergence or resurgence of grievances, which could undermine communal resilience against violent extremism. Prioritising the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of al-Jada'a residents and individuals awaiting repatriation is paramount. Over the past two years, the Iraqi government has repatriated approximately 7,000 Iraqis from Syria's al-Hol refugee camp, representing close relatives of ISIS militants.²⁹ However, the current landscape of reintegration and rehabilitation for Iraqis returning from Syria is deficient. Reintegration and rehabilitation do not appear to be prioritised by the Iraqi government. It is noteworthy that around 30,000 Iraqi individuals remain in Syria's al-Hol camp, awaiting repatriation. Given the scale of this undertaking, there is an evident need for a comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration policy, which is currently lacking.

In speeches, workshops, and conferences on reintegration and rehabilitation, Iraqi officials frequently characterise these individuals in Iraq as “ticking bombs”.³⁰ This description is both insensitive and inaccurate, adopting a militarised conceptualisation and erroneously assuming universal ideological readiness and motivation among these individuals—a premise not empirically supported.

Supporting Local Efforts

Different Iraqi regions have now developed their local plans to prevent violent extremism, supported by the International Organisation for Migration's PVE programme and other organisations.³¹ These locally developed plans, including in non-Sunni Arab areas, represent a positive shift in narrative, moving beyond the conventional and politically insensitive portrayal of Sunni Arab Islamist extremism. The PVE Plans of Action encompass overarching concerns, addressing general issues and those particular to each locality. These plans identify local challenges, such as unemployment, disinformation, the militarisation of youth and society by specific armed groups, and corruption. However, local governments lack the budget to implement the outlined activities in their Plans of Action, relying heavily on international organisations for support. It is crucial to allocate a national budget for these activities. Without adequate funding, there will be limited local ownership and commitment to implement the plans.

Educational Support

In my capacity as a research associate with Ulster University from September 2022 to December 2023, I participated in multiple workshops within the framework of a British Academy-funded project jointly executed by Ulster University and Koya University called “Education Peace and Politics”.³² These workshops explored the intricate interplay among education, politics, and peace in Iraq. A prevailing thematic consensus emerged, positing that the genesis of myriad challenges facing Iraq lies in poor education. However, many Iraqi children still cannot access quality education, and the current educational system in Iraq falls short of furnishing a conducive environment for the cultivation of enduring peace and coexistence.³³

²⁹ Abadi, “Research Summary Paper”.

³⁰ Bas News, “Al-Araji: Al-Hawl camp is a time bomb that must be dismantled”, 4 May 2023, <https://www.basnews.com/ar/babat/805857>

³¹ IOM Iraq, “Plans Launched for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Mosul and Tel Afar,” 7 March 2023, <https://iraq.iom.int/news/plans-launched-prevention-violent-extremism-mosul-and-tel-afar>

³² Education Peace and Politics is a British Academy funded project to better understand the Iraq education landscape, with the aim of promoting social cohesion and equal opportunities in the classroom. See their website: <https://educationpeaceandpolitics.org/>

³³ See: Cook, Joana. “Distinguishing Children From ISIS-Affiliated Families in Iraq and Their Unique Barriers for Rehabilitation and Reintegration”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 17, no. 3 (2023): 42-69.

Persistent issues, exemplified by the segregation of children from families associated with ISIS or the division of classes along ethno-religious lines, endure across various regions of Iraq. It is imperative to advocate for a paradigm shift in discourse, transitioning from characterising violent extremism as a transitory predicament linked to entities such as ISIS or the external exploitation of Sunnis in Iraq. Instead, emphasis must be placed on a sustained, long-term commitment to constructing a society founded on principles of peace. Within this transformative narrative, education warrants substantial attention from the government and international collaborators invested in Iraq.

Empowering Youth

This Policy Brief underscores that the young population of Iraqis aspire to embrace fewer sectarian narratives and have developed a degree of resilience against violent extremist messaging. It is imperative to acknowledge and foster this shift. International partners, in collaboration with Iraq's civil society stakeholders, must prioritise initiatives aimed at safeguarding the youth from the harmful effects of sectarian divisions. This support should be sustained over the long term and encompass a comprehensive range of interventions, including education and skill development, economic opportunities, counselling and support groups, and inclusive policies and governance.

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