

Sect, Nation, and Identity after the Fall of Mosul: Evidence from a Natural Experiment¹

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How does war affect group identity? Does common threat unite ethnic groups behind the nation? What explains subethnic heterogeneity in identity responses? To answer these questions, scholarship to date has relied on laboratory settings or postwar surveys. The difficulty of conducting social inquiry in wartime means we lack systematic data on identity within real world conflict episodes. The author addresses this gap by exploiting a unique source of exogenous variation—the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)—during the fieldwork for a nationally representative survey in Iraq. He finds systematic differences in the identity responses of Sunni and Shi'i Iraqis. While Shi'is cleave to the nation, Sunnis mobilize behind an Arab identity. In tribal areas, however, Sunnis rally behind the nation. Findings are explained with reference to prior attachment and achieved cooperation. Excluded groups are less likely to identify with the nation, but where organization enables interethnic cooperation, wartime mobilization generates national loyalty.

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On June 10, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) laid claim to Mosul, Iraq's second city.² In ensuing days, ISIS would take over government buildings, seize control of major oil fields, and begin an advance toward the capital city, Baghdad. On June 29, just 19 days after the fall of Mosul, the group would formally declare the birth of a new Islamic State, or *al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya*. The fall of Mosul to ISIS represents one of the most dramatic events in the modern history of Iraq. It also had transformative consequences. At the time of the assault, Iraq was deeply divided. Throughout 2013, Sunni-majority regions had been host to frequent protests against the exclusionary Shi'i-dominated regime of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. In the wake of Mosul's fall, Iraqis witnessed conationals enlist in civilian defense forces to mount a campaign against the ISIS-led assault. And these recruits came from both Shi'i and Sunni regions. Enemies had become allies in the face of a common ISIS threat. Looking on, commentators spoke of the reemergence of an Iraqi nationalism that had been all but lost in recent times.

This dynamic will be familiar to scholars of both conflict and intergroup identity. The idea that war can both destroy and unite also has a long prehistory in sociology. For Simmel (1955), the nation represented the preeminent social group. And the "intensification" of group bonds forged in conflict helped explain the origin of national loyalties: "France owes the consciousness of its national unity to its fight against the English, and only the Moorish war made the Spanish regions into one people" (p. 100). For conflict scholars, identity in wartime is often fluid and subject to transformations that are "multidirectional" both within and across groups (Kalyvas 2008, p. 1045). But it has been left largely to the field of social psychology, and to laboratory-level research, to theorize and test the microlevel determinants of group formation (Brewer 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1979), cooperation (Sherif 1966), and common identification (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000). Testing these findings in situations of real world conflict is normally not possible. The external validity of these arguments therefore remains an open question. Do groups unite in the face of common threat? And how do we explain different subgroup responses?

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² I elect to use "ISIS" since, at the time of the fall of Mosul, ISIS had not yet transferred its franchise to the more expansive "Islamic State," which occurred on June 29. In what follows, I will refer on occasion to Sunnis rather than Sunni Arabs and to Shi'is rather than Shi'i Arabs. I am aware that both Sunni Kurds and (Faili) Shi'i Kurds are Iraqis but not Arabs. In the analyses that follow, however, I focus solely on non-Kurdish regions and will thus refer to both sects using this shortened qualifier. The principal cleavage among Arab Iraqi communities is that between Sunni and Shi'i Iraqis. In referring to this as an "ethnic" division, I follow Horowitz (1985) in understanding "religious" or "sectarian" identities as subsets of ethnicity (see also Wimmer 2008).

By exploiting a nationally representative survey that was in the field when Mosul fell to ISIS, I am able to provide some answers. The outcome of interest comes from one item probing self-reported identity. I use this question to determine the effects of the fall of Mosul on national identification. The chance timing of the survey fieldwork means we are able to divide our sample into control (pre-Mosul) and treatment (post-Mosul) groups. Relying on this natural experiment setup, I test two hypotheses relevant to threat and identity formation.

I derive the hypotheses from a theoretical synthesis of the social psychology and political sociology literature. The first hypothesis probes the effect of *prior attachment* on the likelihood of rallying behind a national identity. Ethnically excluded groups are less attached to the nation because of their marginalized political position. As a result, when faced with threat, individuals from these groups are less likely to seek refuge in a national identity. The second hypothesis follows from the first and investigates the conditions under which preexisting divisions may nonetheless be overcome. Here, I argue that the experience of *achieved cooperation*—when groups manage to cooperate in the face of threat—has the capacity to produce a common superordinate identity. That is, when an individual witnesses her coethnics engage in interethnic mobilization, war may yet stimulate common national identification.

Support for these hypotheses comes from a series of matching strategies and multilevel models used to test for differences between treatment (post-Mosul) and control (pre-Mosul) groups. I find that Sunnis—a group with low prior attachment to the state—are significantly less likely to rally behind the nation after Mosul's fall. However, consistent with expectations, in areas with a high density of tribal ties, where military cooperation between groups could be achieved, the fall of Mosul saw Sunnis rally strongly behind the nation.

The empirical contribution of this article is twofold. By exploiting a natural experiment in a real world conflict setting, I am able to assess the external validity of theoretical predictions about intergroup identity, which to date have been drawn almost exclusively from the laboratory. Second, by using a nationally representative survey, I am also able to extend these theoretical insights and demonstrate their applicability at the level of populations—not just at the level of combatants. The findings have two implications with broader theoretical relevance for understanding processes of nation building and war. First, they demonstrate how profoundly ethnic cleavages shape the response of populations to the outbreak of war. Where exclusion prevails, I show, war may have disintegrative effects as only the group in power rallies behind a national identity under threat. But the results indicate too that common inclusion in war efforts can lead to renewed national loyalties generally. The decisions of states to pursue collaborative alliances are therefore

consequential for not only the conduct of war but also the identity loyalties of populations at large. In Iraq, such collaboration was partly achieved through tribal networks that facilitated mobilization across categorical divides. In this, we see how crosscutting alliances may foster nation building not only in peacetime but also in war.

IDENTITY AND MOBILIZATION IN IRAQ

Iraq before the Fall of Mosul

At the time of the June 2014 assault on Mosul, Iraq was deeply divided along ethnic lines. This process had begun many years earlier with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. During this time, the disbandment of the Iraqi Army and broader process of de-Ba'athification (removal of Saddam Hussein-era figures from state institutions) had equated, in the minds of many Sunnis, to Shi'i state capture (Allawi 2007; Cordesman 2008; Tripp 2010). Protracted civil war violence ensued from 2004 to 2007, a period that saw the first emergence of al-Qai'da in Iraq (AQI). This was the also first time in post-2003 Iraq that Sunni communities had mobilized in defense of the Iraqi nation (Mansour 2016). On this occasion, it was through the vehicle of the *Ṣaḥawāt* organizations. The Sahwa (Awakening) was the name given to the mobilization of Sunni tribal forces alongside the U.S. Army from 2006 to 2007 to fight against AQI.

In the context of post-2003 Iraq, tribes were largely sedentary and urbanized groups claiming common kinship through (sometimes fictitious) patrilineal lines of descent (Dawod 2014). State weakness, particularly in Sunni regions of Iraq, meant that tribal groupings became key conduits for the distribution of government services and employment (Baram 2003; Asfura-Heim 2014). Tribal leaders, or *sheikhs*, thus acted as patrons, fulfilling clientelist contracts between the state and their tribal group or local community. And as civil war broke out, the same groups mobilized their communities to participate in an insurgent campaign against the U.S. invasion (Baram 2005).

A majority of insurgents hailed from Sunni tribal groups in the central and northern provinces of Anbar, Diyala, and Salah ad-Din (Baram 2005; Cordesman 2008). Over time, many of them would shift allegiances and turn their guns against the newly emergent threat of AQI. Tribal allegiances first moved against AQI in 2006 in Ramadi, Anbar province. This movement would soon spread across large swathes of northern Iraq and Baghdad. As a result, tribal groups received formal training under the guidance of United States and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).³ In turn, volunteers—who became

³ The ISF refers to the federal military and police forces in Iraq. Local police forces are distinct from the federal police, who are intended as a bridging force between local police and the Iraqi Army.

formally recognized as “Sons of Iraq” (*abna al-‘Irāq*)—were remunerated with a monthly salary and given assurances that they would eventually be incorporated into the Iraqi police forces or given employment in local government or private-sector organizations (Harari 2010; Benraad 2011).⁴ In total, around 100,000 volunteers were recruited to such organizations, which were active across the central and northern provinces of Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Diyala, and Baghdad (Mansoor 2013). The Sahwa groups were used most often as auxiliary holding forces, staffing checkpoints, or as neighborhood watch organizations within their local communities (McWilliams and Wheeler 2009; Mansoor 2013).

Under the leadership of Nouri al-Maliki, elected prime minister in 2006, Iraq witnessed a gradual decline in violence. With the assistance of Sunni tribal Sahwa units and the U.S. Army, AQI was all but defeated. After holding on to the premiership in the elections of 2010, Maliki reiterated a commitment to ensuring domestic security without the aid of the paramilitary organizations that had proliferated in post-2003 Iraq (Mansour and Jabar 2017). In the context of U.S. withdrawal, however, Maliki became increasingly reliant on Iranian support, particularly in the realm of security. In return for their support, Iran made demands that Maliki sanction the mobilization of Shi’i paramilitary organizations to support the besieged regime of Bashar al-Assad in neighboring Syria (Mansour 2016). Maliki would subsequently call on this loose assemblage of nonstate forces to mount a fight against ISIS.

Shi’i communities in Iraq, who have a religious affinity with their Iranian neighbors, have long been accused, in state discourse and in sectarian Sunni literatures, of separatist Iranian sympathies (Nakash 2006; Tripp 2010). Under Maliki, these suspicions grew. His overtures to Iran were accompanied by a concerted campaign to sideline Sunni political opponents. Despite initial assurances, he would also renege on promises politically to incorporate representatives from tribal communities that had assisted in the Sahwa campaign (Al-Qarawee 2014; Gerges 2016). By invoking new counterterror laws, Maliki then aimed to subordinate more restive Sunni groups and began arresting influential Sunni political and tribal figures (Abdulrazaq and Stansfield 2016).

Against this backdrop, Sunni-majority regions became host to frequent protest against the ethnically exclusionary Maliki administration. These began in late 2012 in the Sunni-majority provinces of Anbar, Nineweh, and Salah ad-Din, before spreading later to Baghdad, Diyala, and Kirkuk (Wicken 2013). The escalation of several protests into violent standoffs culminated

⁴ The Sahwa refers specifically to the first mobilization of tribes against AQI in Anbar. The Sons of Iraq program was a U.S.-led initiative to train and formalize the inclusion of newly allied tribal groups within institutions of the Iraqi state. Over time, the “Sahwa” has become a catchall term, in both Arabic and English, to refer to these groups. It is this term that I adopt in what follows.

in the brutal repression of protest in the middle of 2013—an event that convinced many in the region that they were “facing a Tehran-controlled Shiite crescent intent on subordinating Sunnis” (ICG 2014). For some, the violent response to these protests, and the continued pursuit of exclusionary policies by the Shi’i-dominated Maliki regime, helps explain the rise of ISIS and its ability to win influence among Iraqi Sunni communities (Cockburn 2015; Abdulrazaq and Stansfield 2016).

But Sunni Sahwa forces were still either operative or in abeyance across large parts of Iraq. Exact numbers are not known. We do know, however, that tribal Sahwa forces were continuing to fulfill their roles at checkpoints and in neighborhood watch organizations through 2014 (McGurk 2014). By late 2013, some Sahwa groups had also begun “reconstituting themselves” in response to the deteriorating security situation, the threat of ISIS, and repression at the hands of the ISF (Ali 2013).

While most did not support ISIS, tribal groups were nonetheless staunchly opposed to the policies of the Maliki regime. Finding themselves between the hammer and the anvil, they continued to cooperate with local police but were determinedly opposed to cooperating with the Iraqi Army, which they had begun to perceive as a hostile force (Lewis et al. 2014). By the summer of 2014, then, “the last thing many Sunni tribal leaders wanted was to join sides with, or serve at the behest of, the Iraqi government and the Shi’a militia groups” who now held sway in the fight against ISIS (Gaston 2018).

The Fall of Mosul

On June 6, 2014, ISIS launched an unexpected attack on Mosul from bases across the Syrian border. With a population of over 1.5 million, Mosul was Iraq’s second-largest city. In just four days, a band of 1,300 fighters overcame the combined forces of approximately 60,000 Iraqi army and police personnel (Cockburn 2015). While ISIS had been a long-term presence in Anbar province, in the southwest of Iraq, few, if anyone, had expected a campaign on Iraq’s second city. Until June 10, the severity of the assault on Mosul and its likely outcomes had also been difficult to discern. National newspapers contained small reports of clashes in Nineweh Province, but the seizure of Mosul by ISIS was a barely considered prospect.⁵ Google Trends data provide a window onto this. While there were slight increases between June 6 and 9, it was only after June 10 that search interest, and news interest, in Iraq for ISIS (*dā’ish*; داعش) and Mosul (*al-mūṣil*; الموصل) spiked (see fig. 1).⁶

⁵ Front pages of Iraqi national newspapers on June 9 and 10 can be found in fig. A1 (figs. A1–A5, B1–B9, and C1 are available online).

⁶ It is also worth noting that the majority of the uptick in search interest for Mosul between June 6 and 9 comes from the provinces of Nineweh, Erbil, and Duhok; i.e., the

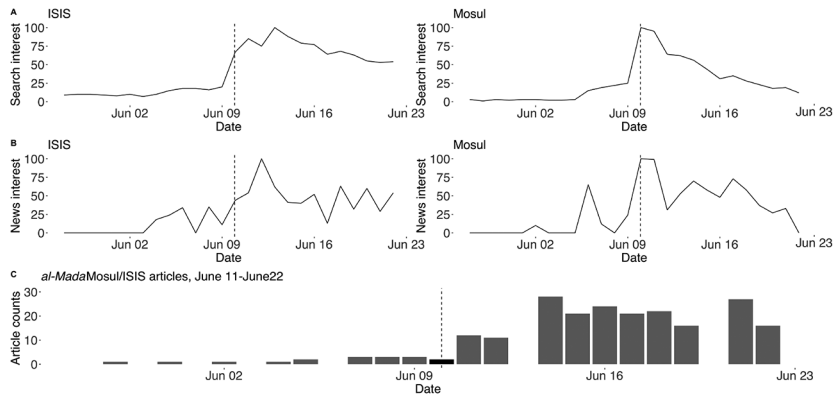


FIG. 1.—Google Trends and *al-Mada* data for Iraq from the period May 28–June 22, 2014. Vertical dashed lines indicate June 10 and the fall of Mosul. *A*, Search volume for *dāʿish* and *al-mūṣil*; *B*, news interest for *dāʿish* and *al-mūṣil*; *C*, *al-Mada* article counts.

A manual count of articles in *al-Mada* newspaper mentioning *dāʿish* or Mosul (fig. 1) over the dates of the survey data analyzed below points to the same trend.⁷ The fall of Mosul, in other words, was both sudden and unexpected.

These were extraordinary and unprecedented events. If previously Sunni jihadist forces had threatened Iraqi national security, it was through unconventional warfare, attacking Western forces or Shiʿi targets with sporadic “terrorist” and “guerrilla” style tactics (Kalyvas 2015). By stark contrast, the fall of Mosul to ISIS, and subsequent territorial gains, took the form of more conventional organized warfare and represented an existential threat to Iraqi territorial integrity, even casting into doubt the continued existence of Iraq as a nation.

After the Fall of Mosul

Immediately following the fall of Mosul, Iraq’s political and religious elites made urgent appeals for unity, the formation of a national unity government,

province in which Mosul is located and the surrounding provinces. These provinces are not in our survey sample. Search interest is calculated as the number of searches for keywords denominated by total searches. This is then indexed on a 1–100 scale and normalized relative to the location and date range specified (here, Iraq and the date range of the survey). Thus, a value of 100 represents the day, within the specified location and date range, on which search concentration was at its peak, relative to other days in the same location. Search language and news interest language is Arabic; location is set to Iraq. For further information, see Choi and Varian (2012).

⁷ *Al-Mada* is a leading national daily in Iraq with an independent political outlook. It does not publish on Fridays (the first day of the weekend in Iraq), hence the zero counts on these days.

and recruitment of a popular civilian defense force. On June 11, Iraq's foremost Shi'i religious leader, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also called on all able Iraqi citizens to volunteer to fight against ISIS. His fatwa was absent any sectarian language and was even qualified with an addendum on June 12 stating that it represented a nationalist appeal to all Iraqis, encouraging voluntary recruitment to the ISF rather than any sectarian militia. Despite this, Maliki exploited the fatwa to formalize the mobilization of Iraq's Shi'i militias under the banner of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF; Mansour and Jabar 2017, p. 7). His efforts were to legitimize the subsumption of these militias into the state forces fighting ISIS.

Civilian mobilization was not the sole preserve of Shi'i Iraqis, however. In a speech on June 10, Maliki made appeals across ethnosectarian lines by explicitly calling on (Sunni) Iraqi tribes to volunteer to fight. On June 13, Saad Maan, spokesperson for the Iraqi Interior Ministry, announced plans for the formal remobilization of Sahwa organizations to defend Baghdad. In the 12 days following the fall of Mosul (the period covered by the survey analyzed below), Sunni tribal forces would mobilize alongside the ISF, PMF, and sometimes Kurdish Peshmerga, in four separate provinces and 13 districts.⁸

This pattern of tribal mobilization would continue over the coming months.⁹ It is important to note that such military cooperation between Sunni tribes, Shi'i militias, and ISF did not predate the fall of Mosul and was in no way a given. In the months and years preceding the fall of Mosul, the same Sunni tribal groupings had been participants in the protracted, and sometimes violent, protests against the ethnically exclusive Maliki regime described above (Wicken 2013). The Sahwa organizations, where still operative, had been consistently marginalized in the years following the defeat of AQI and U.S. withdrawal (Benraad 2011; Gerges 2016). The cooperation of these tribal groups alongside the Iraqi Army and Shi'i militias was a result, then, not of preexisting allegiances but the threat posed by ISIS: erstwhile adversaries had become allies in the face of the ISIS-led onslaught.

Observers at the time were keenly aware of the transformative potential of Mosul's fall for sectarian relations in Iraq. Writing on June 15, Hisham al-Hashimi, a prominent commentator on Iraqi internal affairs and Islamist

⁸ These were Ba'quba, Hamrine, Miqdadiyah, Udham (Diyala Province), Bashir, Hawija (Kirkuk Province), Tel Afaar (Nineweh Province), Alam, al-Mu'tasim, Dhuluiya, Dujail, Tikrit, and Tuz Khurmatu (Salah ad-Din Province). Reports of tribal mobilizations were compiled through online searches of multiple Iraqi newspapers, including *al-Mada*, *al-Mashriq*, *Azzaman*, *Alsumaria News*, and *Shafaq News*, several of which were found in Iraq military message boards. See, e.g., <https://tinyurl.com/iraqmlmsgbrd> (last accessed November 25, 2020).

⁹ In the remainder of June, and through July, clashes between Sunni tribal forces and ISIS were reported in all of Haditha, Ramadi (Anbar Province), al-Jazeera, Khamis, Miqdadiyah, Sadia, Sansal, Udham (Diyala Province), Hawija, Rashad, Taza (Kirkuk Province), Amerli, Dhuluiya, Mishak, and Zowiya (Salah ad-Din Province; ISW 2014).

politics, argued that the fall of Mosul to ISIS was not an unqualified ill. Rather, it had succeeded in reigniting a much needed “nationalist spirit” (*rūḥ waṭaniyya*), he wrote, asserting that the fight against ISIS was not a sectarian battle between Iraq’s Sunni and Shi’i communities but a resistance campaign in which “all the people of Iraq could participate” (see *al-Mada* June 15, 2014, p. 16). Accompanying the article was a cartoon by Maytham Radhi depicting two (Sunni and Shi’i) militiamen reconciling their differences under the heading “Thank you Da’ish.” Riffing on another of his cartoons from just six days prior, the same cartoonist would depict the tree of sectarianism (“*ṭā’ifiyya*”) being felled to reunite a divided Iraq and chase away the jihadist invader (see fig. 2).

But does commonly experienced threat, and the experience of cooperation in wartime, actually find expression in renewed national loyalties? The first of these cartoons suggests that new alliances and attitudes may have developed among combatants, but does the threat of war actually unite whole populations as the second would have us believe? Before surveying the empirical



FIG. 2.—Cartoons by Maytham Radhi published in *al-Mada* newspaper. A, June 15, 2014, p. 16. Right (Shi’i) figure is saying, “Now, for the first time, I know you’re against terrorism,” while the left (Sunni) figure is saying, “Now, for the first time, I know you’re with Iraq.” B, June 5, 2014, p. 18, and June 11, 2014, p. 16. Left image shows banner reading, “Iraq,” and the land underneath spells out the same word cut in two; right image shows the word “Iraq” on one side of the land and “Mosul” on the other, and the tree reads “sectarianism.” Back issues of *al-Mada* are located at <https://almadapaper.net/file.php>.

evidence, the next section asks first how we should theorize the identity consequences of war.

THEORIZING IDENTITY IN WAR

This article builds from a central claim in the theoretical literature on identity: that identification with a social group is subject to situational change given the variable salience of group identities. This basic insight is shared across literatures in sociology, social and political psychology, anthropology, and economics (Moerman 1965; Akerlof and Kranton 2000; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Stets and Burke 2000). The constructivist understanding of identity as a dynamic, shifting construct subject to situational redefinition, and exhibiting inter- and intragroup heterogeneity, has come to dominate the theoretical literature on conflict (e.g., Brubaker 2004, 2009; Hale 2004; Abdelal et al. 2006; Kalyvas 2006, 2008; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Wimmer 2008, 2013).

Despite these theoretical insights, there remains little systematic empirical work investigating how they operate within contexts of war. Owing to the dangers of conducting social inquiry in conflict settings, the scholarship that does exist relies on postwar surveys to gauge longer-term effects of war, or threat of war, on social and political identities (Balcells 2012; Dyrstad 2012; Gibler, Hutchison, and Miller 2012; Wimmer 2015, 2018; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Nair and Sambanis 2019) or investigates the identity consequences of elections and exposure to violence short of war (Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010; Beber, Roessler, and Scacco 2014; Gutiérrez-Romero 2014).¹⁰ Alternatively, scholars have examined identity dynamics within laboratory contexts, assigning arbitrary group categories and experimentally manipulating the conflictual setting to investigate the conditions under which common or competing identities might result (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Gaertner et al. 1993). These experiments typically have high internal but unknown external validity, as arbitrary group assignments in laboratory conditions may not be

¹⁰ Balcells (2012), as well as Lupu and Peisakhin (2017), uses specialized postwar surveys to assess the intergenerational transmission of political identities. Dyrstad (2012) uses before and after surveys in Bosnia, wherein the time lag to assess the effect of the war “treatment” is considerable (eight years), while Gibler et al. (2012) use cross-national survey data combined with Correlates of War data, wherein territorial threat is coded as a dichotomous measure of military dispute occurrence in the five years before the survey being fielded. Wimmer (2015, 2018), for his part, studies the effects of war on national identification in a cross-national multivariate regression context by including variables measuring the incidence of prior ethnonationalist conflict. A cognate literature examines the longer-term consequences of war for prosociality and (intergroup) cooperation (Blattman and Miguel 2010; Bauer et al. 2016; Mironova and Whitt 2016). To my knowledge, this article represents the first time identity shifts have been captured using a natural experimental design in contexts of domestic conflict, providing a far stronger identification tool.

immediately transferable to a real world setting (Abbink 2012). As a result, the extent to which identity attachments precede or are produced by war remains a subject of central and ongoing theoretical interest in the study of conflict (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Denny and Walter 2014).

To theorize changes in identity loyalties, I combine insights first from social psychology and second from political science and sociology. The resulting theoretical synthesis comes in two parts. Social identities confer psychological security. Individuals thus feel a stronger sense of attachment to collectivities from which they derive such security. This *prior attachment* to a given collectivity will then shape identity responses in the face of threat. Only when groups commonly perceive the nation as a source of security will a common rallying response result. And when power asymmetries between groups exist (e.g., in contexts of ethnic exclusion), it is less likely they will both perceive the nation-state as a source of security. Second, I argue that identity responses are subject to contextual variance on the basis of *achieved cooperation*. When groups do cooperate—or form alliances—this cooperation can promote national identification even when power asymmetries exist and prior attachment in one group is low.

In emphasizing prior attachments and achieved cooperation, I argue that both cleavages predating the onset of conflict and alliances forged internal to conflict may impinge on identity loyalties. In this, I follow Kalyvas and Kocher (2007, p. 204), who recommend an attention to both “exogenous” and “endogenous cleavages,” noting that “the violence observed during a civil war is not necessarily only a reflection of existing cleavages but may create new ones or give new content to existing ones.” But it is worth also marking a key difference in the argument advanced in this article. Where existing literature focuses on ethnic exclusion and alliance formation to understand rebel group formation and the shifting identity loyalties of combatants in wartime (Kalyvas 2006, 2008; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Christia 2012; Lewis 2017), here I am interested not in combatants per se but in the effects of conflict and cooperation on identity loyalties at the population level.

Prior Attachments and Identification

In what follows, I build from a body of research in social psychology targeting the dynamics of group identification. In particular, I take lessons from optimal distinctiveness theory, which sees ethnocentric attachments as based fundamentally on “expectations of cooperation and security” within groups (Brewer 1999, p. 433). In-groups are thus defined as “bounded communities of mutual obligation and trust” (Brewer 2000, p. 122). The importance of this theory is most obvious in relation to contexts of threat. Here, it predicts that feelings of group solidarity will increase in the face of threat as individuals derive psychological security from identification with that group (Brewer 1991,

2007).¹¹ Similar security-seeking mechanisms are proposed by scholars across various disciplines. When faced with threat, individuals exposed to danger will identify with the category most likely to provide “access to security-granting institutions” (Gorman and Seguin 2018, p. 712; see also Posner 2007; Wimmer 2013). Even in ethnically heterogeneous settings, this institution is most often the nation (Gibler et al. 2012; Sambanis and Shayo 2013).

For social groups within a given nation to commonly cleave to a national identity, there must, however, be “some mutual recognition of common, superordinate identity” before the emergence of this threat (Brewer 2000, p. 121). In other words, the experience of common threat alone is not enough to produce shared identity loyalties. Translated to a national context, this theory would then predict that, for groups to rally behind a common national identity, members of these groups must feel some shared prior attachment to this collectivity. *Prior attachments* thus precondition identity responses to threat.¹²

This concern with prior attachments is, in fact, common to much literature in conflict studies and public opinion research. Early theoretical work on conflict and cohesion, building on the work of Coser (1956), cites “prior solidarity” as a key determinant of intergroup cohesion, and common identification, in the wake of conflict outbreak (Stein 1976, p. 145). This finding has received wider validation in experimental and observational studies of threat and identification: where individuals lack prior trust in, and attachment to, the given (national) collectivity, threat is markedly less likely to induce individuals to defend institutions of state or rally behind the nation (Kay et al. 2009; Gorman and Seguin 2018).

In an experimental setting, particularistic in-group identities are normally assigned such that individuals in subgroup A and subgroup B, for example, are exposed to variable experimental conditions. In this way the researcher is able to test the conditions under which both groups rally behind a common superordinate group C identity (Brewer 2000; Gaertner and Dovidio 2000). This situation is complicated when one group is in the majority or holds more power. In such contexts, the majority subgroup tends to see its own identity as “prototypical” of any common superordinate identity (Mummendey and

¹¹ Note the distinction between these claims and those from positive distinctiveness theory (see, e.g., Turner 1985), which sees in-group favoritism as driven by self-enhancement rather than security motivations.

¹² Note that rallying behind a national identity is distinct from “rally-round-the-flag” effects whereby individuals express increased confidence in state institutions under threat (Perrin and Smolek 2009). After the fall of Mosul, trust in the government and military actually decreases for both Sunnis and Shi’is (see Gates and Justesen [2020] for similar findings in Mali). This is consistent with a view that finding psychological security through in-group identification is distinct from rallying behind particular state institutions (Huddy et al. 2005).

Wenzel 1999). Consistent with these predictions, evidence from cross-national surveys demonstrates that the majority ethnic group often perceives its own ethnicity as synonymous with the nation (Staerklé et al. 2010). Refining this argument, Wimmer (2018) argues that, rather than demographic differences in relative group size, it is the position of a group within the ethnopolitical field of power that most strongly affects national identification. In ethnically exclusionary contexts, the dominant, included social group will often claim the national identity as its own in-group (Smith 1986; Sambanis and Shayo 2013). Conversely, when groups are excluded from power they are significantly less likely to identify with the nation (Wimmer 2018; Green 2020).¹³

Where significant power asymmetries prevail between groups, we can expect differential responses to threat. Conflict activates a security-seeking mechanism whereby individuals search for psychological security in the face of threat. Excluded groups are less likely to perceive the nation as a source of in-group security, will have lower prior attachment to the nation, and thus are less likely to emphasize a national identity in conditions of threat. Conversely, members of the dominant, or included, group are more likely to perceive the nation as a source of in-group security, will have stronger prior attachment to a national identity they see as synonymous with their own in-group, and thus are more likely to cleave to a national identity under threat.

The political field in Iraq in 2014 was defined by the exclusion of minority Sunni communities (see Allawi 2007; Cordesman 2008; Gerges 2016). We can therefore expect the excluded Sunni minority to be less likely to identify with a national collectivity, whereas we expect members of the dominant Shi'i majority to be more likely to identify with the nation. In line with these expectations, the survey analyzed below reveals that, before the fall of Mosul, a full 20 percentage points more Shi'is identified with the nation compared with Sunni Iraqis (60% vs. 40%).

Under conditions of threat, the theoretical framework outlined above proposes that responsive national identification will be shaped by these prior attachments. A first hypothesis thus follows.

HYPOTHESIS 1.—*Groups with low (high) prior attachment to the nation are less (more) likely to rally behind the nation under threat.*

The implication of this hypothesis is that interethnic differences in identification will increase in the face of threat. That is, threat may exacerbate preexisting identity cleavages: Shi'is (Sunnis) who were already more (less) likely to identify with the nation may identify even more (less) strongly with the nation relative to their Sunni (Shi'i) conationals.

¹³ Exclusion is often accompanied by significant state-led repression, as was the case in Iraq. Recent experimental work finds that state victimization also leads to reduced national identification (Nair and Sambanis 2019). Perceptions of ethnic inclusion within state security forces also lead to reduced support for antigovernment violence (Nanes 2020).

To where, then, do excluded groups turn when threatened? Recent work by Gorman and Seguin (2018) finds that marginalized constituencies tend to emphasize expansive, even global, identities compared to their included, or less marginalized, conationals. This finding is conditional on the marginalized group perceiving “global actors” as potential sources of security. The survey I analyze below does not contain a question probing attachment to “world society,” and so we cannot test the specific claims of Gorman and Seguin (2018).¹⁴

The survey does, however, offer respondents a more expansive “Arab” identity category. Before 2003, Sunni state domination and a pronounced (pan-)Arabism comingled in Iraq, with the salience of Arabism in Iraq’s Sunni communities sometimes couched in anti-Shi’i and anti-Iranian terms (see Dawisha 1999; Wimmer 2002; Nakash 2006; Haddad 2011). Further, “in the post-2003 environment,” writes Haddad, “many Sunnis anchored their identity in the Arab world that was seen as their only ally against what they regarded as a political order that excluded them and was dominated by Iranian influence” (2011, p. 167; see also Allawi 2007; Tripp 2010). Examining the survey data, before Mosul’s fall, nearly three times the proportion of Sunnis (19%) compared with Shi’is (7%) identified as primarily Arab. Given reduced attachment to the nation, and the availability of a more expansive identity dimension for Sunnis, we may thus expect that threat will provoke this type of border-crossing identification.

HYPOTHESIS 2.—Excluded groups will cleave to expansive (nonnational) identity dimensions.

Cooperation and Identification

When can common threat bring groups closer together? Recall that theory does not predict a common identity to result simply from commonly experienced threat. Instead, some mutual attachment to a more inclusive identity must precede the emergence of any threat. A crucial qualification to this

¹⁴ The survey does include separate questions asking respondents whether they view the United States, Russia, and China as sources of stability or instability. Before the fall of Mosul, 82% of Sunnis saw the United States as a source of instability. The majority of Sunni respondents (57% and 54% respectively) saw Russia and China, two other key global actors, as not affecting their country. The translated wording of the question was as follows: “Do you think any of these countries (or institutions) poses a factor of stability or instability to your country?: USA.” Options included “Factor of instability,” “Does not affect my country,” “Factor of stability,” and “Don’t know.” It thus seems unlikely, given Sunnis’ appraisal of major world superpowers, that they would identify as “world citizens.” This would be consistent with Gorman and Seguin (2018), who find that citizens who are marginalized but nonetheless have recent experience of conflict with international actors do not identify as global citizens.

model has yet to be mentioned, however. Additional experimental research found that once cooperation is achieved between groups, intergroup biases may be overcome, and a common identity may result (Deschamps and Brown 1983; Brewer 2000). These findings motivated later research on common in-group identity formation, which points to the importance of actually achieved cooperation for transforming “perceptions of group boundaries from ‘us’ and ‘them’ to a more inclusive ‘we’” (Gaertner et al. 1993, p. 1; see also Brewer 1996, 2000; Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Riek et al. 2010). One way of achieving such cooperation is through the assignment of crosscutting categorizations (Marcus-Newhall et al. 1993; Crisp and Hewstone 1999; Crisp, Walsh, and Hewstone 2006).¹⁵

While operating largely outside of this theoretical framework, research in political science has similarly underscored the capacity of common (national) identification to overcome in-group favoritism (Transue 2007; Dunning and Harrison 2010; Robinson 2016). What is more, conflict studies and historical sociology share an emphasis on crosscutting ties. Stein (1976) cites the internal organization of groups as central to their ability to mount a common response in the face of threat. For his part, Kalyvas (2008) demonstrates that the likelihood a given ethnic grouping, or subgrouping, will engage in cross-ethnic defensive mobilization with incumbents is heightened by “organizational demand” and, specifically, the presence of crosscutting organizational resources enabling of interethnic or intergroup cooperation.

After the fall of Mosul, interethnic cooperation was achieved when Sunni tribal groups mobilized in numerous regions alongside the ISF and PMF. Absent the experimental manipulation possible in a laboratory setting, we can exploit such contextual affordances to test whether the experience of cooperation impinged on identity loyalties. This example of intergroup cooperation relied on the remobilization of Sahwa tribal mobilization groups. The availability of organizations that facilitated the common cooperative inclusion of ethnic counterparts, we can hypothesize, helped overcome intergroup bias and conduced to common national identification.

HYPOTHESIS 3.—*The experience of intergroup cooperation leads to common national identification.*

There is an acknowledged asymmetry to this prediction. This asymmetry is nonetheless derived from theory. Where power imbalances between groups exist—as in contexts of ethnic exclusion—the more powerful group will perceive the national in-group as a source of security irrespective of cooperation. Conversely, threat makes salient the possibility of “exploited cooperation”

¹⁵ Brewer (1999, app. A) discusses explicitly the parallels between social psychology research on crosscutting ties and a large literature in anthropology, political science, and sociology.

for the less powerful group (Brewer 1999, p. 436; see also Brewer 2000). Actually achieved cooperation helps overcome such categorical distrust and thus provides the basis for individuals to derive psychological security from identification with a common (national) in-group. It follows that the achievement of cooperation and common inclusion in a war effort is only consequential for groups who are not already politically included.

Note that experience of cooperation does not imply direct participation in these collaborative military efforts. More recent contributions in social psychology show that cooperation between groups need not be directly experienced by an individual to have an effect; instead the observation and knowledge of collaboration between groups is sufficient to reduce intergroup biases and promote common identification (Crisp and Turner 2009; Miles and Crisp 2014; Vezzali et al. 2015). Here, I argue that proximate collaboration between Sunni tribal groupings and the Iraqi Army and Shi'i militias may find expression in renewed national identification among Sunnis living in these areas. That is, the experience of cooperation can overcome the negative effects of exclusion and low prior attachment. This cooperation, I argue, is partly a function of the availability of crosscutting organizations that promote common inclusion in the war effort. Figure 3 provides a visual summary of the proposed theoretical model.

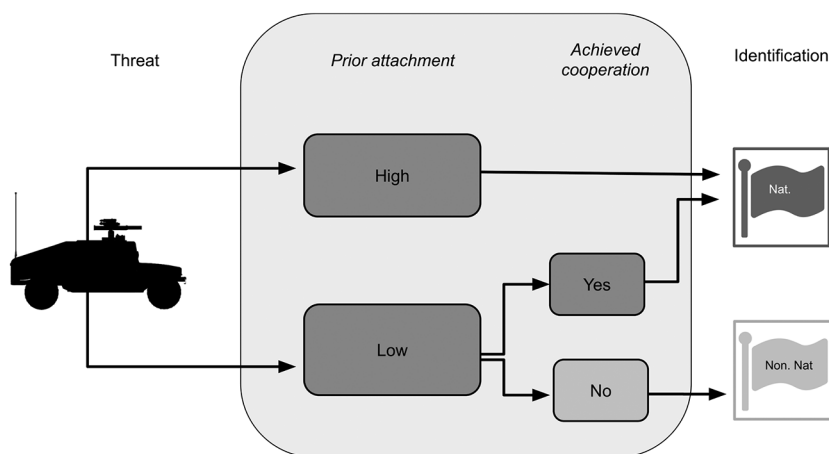


FIG. 3.—Theoretical model for individual identification under conditions of threat. Members of (ethnically included) social groups who are already strongly attached to the nation are likely to rally behind a national identity. Members of (ethnically excluded) social groups are only likely to rally behind a national identity when exposed to proximate intergroup cooperation. Otherwise, this group will cleave to a more expansive, non-national, identity.

DATA AND METHOD

Data Sources

The principal data source I use to test the hypotheses is a nationally representative survey of Iraq conducted as part of the Arab Transformations Project.¹⁶ The survey was in the field over the period May 28–June 22, 2014. The fall of Mosul to ISIS occurred on June 10. The number of survey respondents by day is shown in figure 4. The fall of Mosul to ISIS essentially bisects the respondents into relatively equal before and after groups. Overall, 13 of Iraq's 19 governorates and 36 of its 104 districts were included in the sample. The survey coverage, both before and after Mosul, is displayed in figure 5. Fourteen districts were surveyed before the fall of Mosul (did not receive the treatment), while 13 districts were surveyed after the fall of Mosul (received the treatment), and 10 districts were surveyed both before and after the fall of Mosul (received both treatment and control).¹⁷

The principal dependent variable is coded as a binary response to the question: "If you were being asked to identify yourself, with which of the following would you most likely identify?" Six options are offered: "Your country of origin (*balad al-aṣl*)," "Arab (Ethnicity) (*al-umma al-arabiyya (al-irq)*)," "Muslim (Religion) (*al-islām (al-diyāna)*)," "Region (*al-miṭṭaqa al-jighrāfiyya*)," "Local community, city where you live (*al-mujtama'al-medīna alatī taīsh biha*)," "Other (*ukhra*)."¹⁸ All respondents reported that they lived in their country of birth. I thus take the first item to indicate identification with the Iraqi nation. In using self-reported identity as the dependent variable, I follow several recent contributions using similar measures (e.g., Elkins and Sides 2007; Eifert et al. 2010; Gibler et al. 2012). In the main analysis I remove respondents from Kurdish provinces (Erbil and Sulaymaniyah) since it is not clear what identity attachments they are professing in response to these survey questions (e.g., with Iraqi Kurdistan or Iraq as their "country of origin"). This reduces the total sample size from 1,613 to 1,387.

For the baseline models, I include from the survey individual-level variables for age, gender, and whether the respondent attended college. Nisbet and Myers (2010) find that these basic demographic variables are associated with different forms of identification across numerous countries in the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁸ Importantly, the fall of Mosul is unlikely to affect reporting on these variables, which means we can control for any potential

¹⁶ For an executive summary report of the Arab Transformations survey, see <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/320214/reporting> (last accessed November 11, 2020). The survey was conducted under the auspices of the University of Aberdeen and gained full ethical approval. Full details of the survey can be found in the online appendix.

¹⁷ See the online appendix for full details of districts surveyed.

¹⁸ Similar associations are also observed outside a Middle East context (Coenders and Scheepers 2003; Robinson 2016).

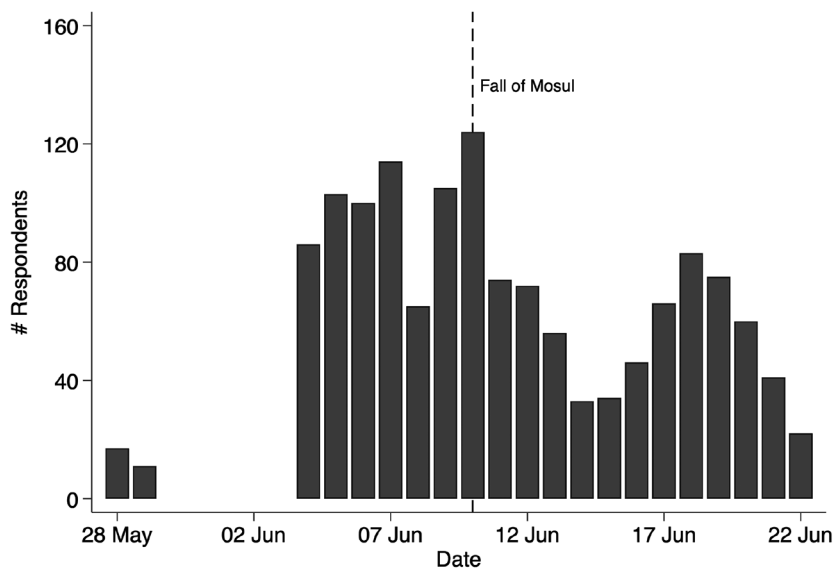


FIG. 4.—Respondents before and after the fall of Mosul. Number of respondents interviewed before the fall of Mosul = 709 (210 Sunni; 499 Shi'i). Number of respondents interviewed after the fall of Mosul = 628 (273 Sunni; 355 Shi'i). Respondents in Kurdish regions are removed.

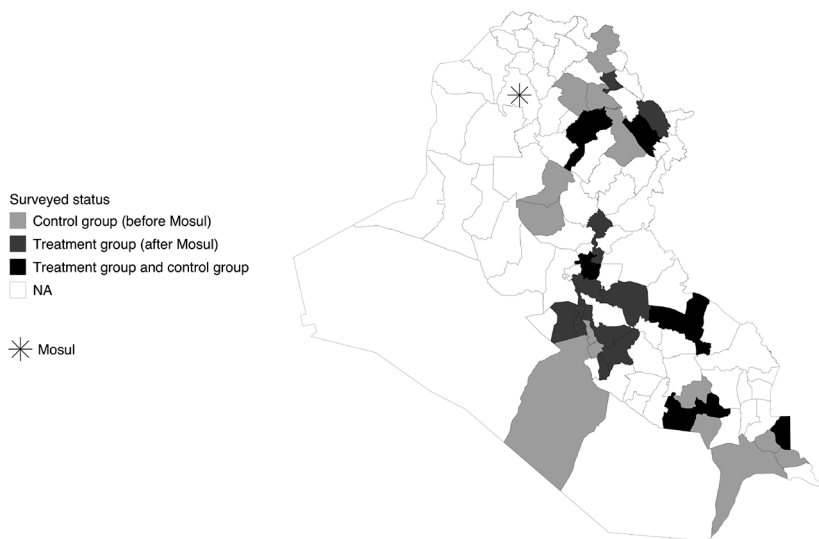


FIG. 5.—Map of survey districts before and after Mosul

confounding without introducing posttreatment bias (Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018).

I combine the survey data with available ecological measures at the district level provided by the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC) Iraq Civil War Dataset version 3.0.¹⁹ Local ecologies likely shape patterns of identification independent of the fall of Mosul. A body of empirical work on intergroup identity suggests that contact between groups may engender common identity (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Brown and Hewstone 2005). To account for this, I use basic measures of the ethnic demographic profile of each of the districts included in the survey (% Sunni/% Shi'i). We also know that exposure to violence may harden subnational identities (Nair and Sambanis 2019) and that the effects of victimization on identity may persist in time (Balcells 2012; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017). I therefore also include information on prehistories of violence (2003–9) in the survey districts using the Iraq Body Count database, cleaned and coded at the district level by ESOC.²⁰ This measure is transformed to its square root.

To gauge the impact of tribal ties on patterns of identification and identity responses to the fall of Mosul, I use a district-level measure of the percentage of households reporting a member of their clan living in the same neighborhood (*mahalla*). This is taken from the 2004 Iraq Living Conditions Survey and again cleaned and coded at the district level by ESOC.²¹ Districts with a higher density of tribal ties are expected to house tribal mobilization structures conducive to collaborative mobilization efforts. The measure is converted to a rate per 10,000 individuals for easier interpretability.

Empirical Strategy

The analysis relies on the exogenous variation in threat of war, and attendant mobilization efforts, produced by the fall of Mosul to ISIS. Separating into distinct before and after groups is made possible by the speed with which Mosul fell. Figure 6 displays the raw proportions of respondents answering for each identity item across both sects and time periods. There are evidently sizable differences across the two periods in the proportions answering for each identity category. In what follows, I focus on the national, Arab, and Islamic identity categories given that very few respondents select

¹⁹ For more information, see <https://esoc.princeton.edu/country/iraq>.

²⁰ The SIGACT III data only include reports where U.S. forces were present, meaning that they likely undercount sectarian violence. For this reason, I test data from the Iraq Body Count database.

²¹ The Iraq Living Conditions Survey is a survey of 21,668 households conducted in Iraq in 2004. For more information, see the online appendix and <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-living-conditions-survey-2004>.

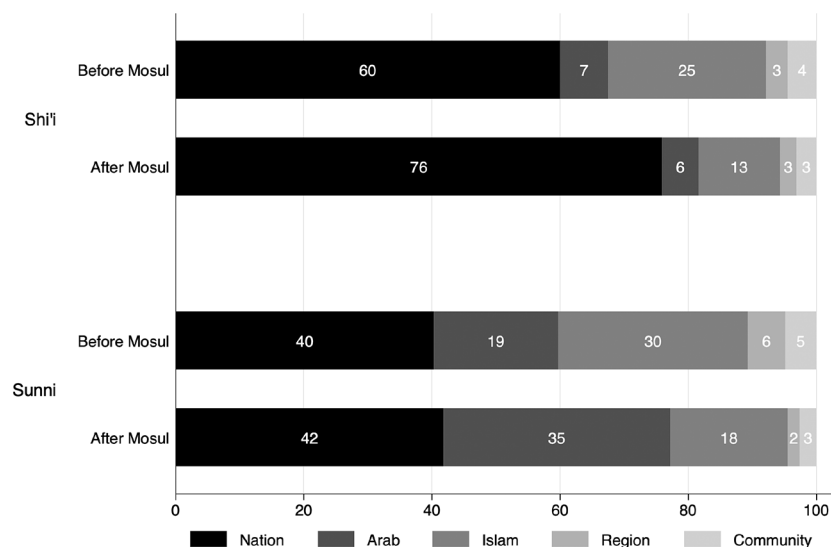


FIG. 6.—Self-identification before and after Mosul for all identity items. Respondents in Kurdish regions are removed.

either of the remaining two items. Each outcome is operationalized as a binary variable coded 1 for the outcome of interest and 0 otherwise.

Following Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández (2020), four initial checks were conducted to determine the ignorability of treatment assignment and to investigate the excludability of potential confounding due to unrelated time trends and simultaneous/proximate events. They include (1) an examination of any changes to survey fieldwork caused by the fall of Mosul, (2) analysis of precise locations of respondents at the subdistrict level using unpublished survey data, (3) analysis of preexisting time trends, and (4) balance checks of relevant pretreatment covariates. These are detailed in full in the online appendix. I summarize here the conclusions we can draw. With the exception of some delays in the two provinces of Baghdad and Diyala due to the unfolding security situation, survey fieldwork was carried out as planned.²² The geographical reach of survey responses is broadly comparable between the two time periods, and there is no evidence that districts farther away from Mosul were more likely to be surveyed after its fall. There are also no obvious time trends in either the outcome measures or other measures probing concern about

²² Substitution rather than quota sampling was used for the survey, thus limiting any reachability bias, which is particularly pronounced with quota sampling in which harder-to-reach populations are more likely to be sampled at the end of the fieldwork (Muñoz et al. 2020). Details of delays to the survey fieldwork are detailed in the technical handbook to the survey and confirmed via private correspondence with Munqith Dagher, the principal investigator for the survey.

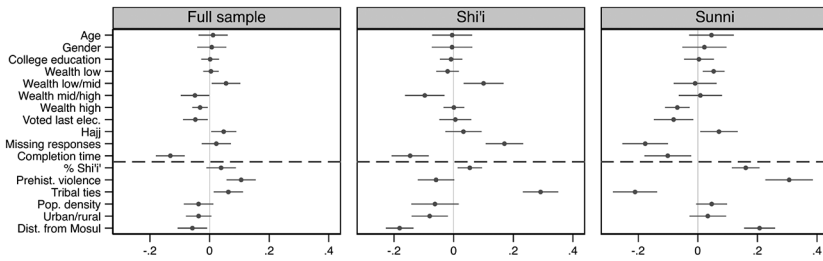


FIG. 7.—Individual and district-level variables' *t*-tests by treatment period (1/0) before or after the fall of Mosul, for combined sample and subsamples by ethnicity of respondent (Shi'i/Sunni). Positive numbers indicate larger proportion in treatment group versus control group. Continuous variables standardized by dividing by twice standard deviation.

domestic security. The absence of preexisting time trends in our identity outcomes helps rule out that differences in identification over the two periods is artifactual of a general monotonic effect of time. The absence of any obvious increase in concern about domestic security before the fall of Mosul gives us greater confidence that results are not biased by individuals anticipating the event before its occurrence. Finally, I conducted balance tests on 14 covariates (8 individual level; 6 district level) that may represent plausible confounders or, in the case of missingness and completion times, indicate reduced response quality after the fall of Mosul. These are plotted in figure 7.²³ There is significant imbalance on several individual- and district-level covariates, and I detail below the measures to counteract any bias this might introduce.²⁴

In a first stage, the fall of Mosul is operationalized as a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the respondent was interviewed after June 10 and 0 if on June 10 or before. Hypotheses 1 and 2 above expect identity responses to differ systematically depending on the ethnic group of the respondent. To test for this, I therefore interact the treatment dummy with the sect (Sunni/Shi'i) of the respondent. Hypothesis 3 expects Sunnis to exhibit subethnic heterogeneity in identity responses depending on tribal presence. To test for this, I interact the treatment with the ecological variable measuring density of tribal ties.

²³ Full details of these covariates are provided in the online appendix. I also conducted balance tests on a series of covariates not included in the final models, which included a measure of religiosity, generalized trust, and employment status. The first two were not used as their inclusion may introduce posttreatment bias; the third was not included as it contained a large number of missing responses. Employment status, in any case, did not exhibit any significant imbalance in either full samples of subsamples by sect.

²⁴ It is worth noting that while increased missingness for Shi'is and reduced completion times for both sects after the fall of Mosul may be cause of concern, the substantive size of these effects is relatively small (approx. four more missing items; approx. 60 seconds shorter completion time). I also control for response quality in robustness checks detailed below.

We know that there is important regional variation in self-reported identity in Iraq (Abbott et al. 2016).²⁵ In the first analyses I therefore use logistic regression with province fixed effects (FE), alongside interactions between province and treatment, to check whether any ethnic differential in treatment effect is confounded by region. Subsequent analyses use mixed effects (ME) logistic regression, which is preferable for allowing some exchangeability between higher-level residuals, while explicitly estimating the between- and within-unit variance. This exchangeability means that ME estimates are more reliable than FE estimates when some level 2 units contain only a small number of observations (Gelman, Hill, and Yajima 2012; Bell, Fairbrother, and Jones 2019).²⁶ In the baseline ME models, I include random intercepts at the province and district levels as well as random coefficients (slopes) for treatment and sect at the district level (Heisig and Schaeffer 2019).²⁷ I retain the random intercepts but do not estimate random coefficients in the model for Islamic identity as there is insufficient within-unit variation in the treatment, causing the model to become unstable.

Six covariates are included in the baseline FE and ME models: age, gender, and college education measured at the individual level and ethnic demographics (% Sunni/% Shi'i), prehistories of violence, and density of tribal ties measured at the district level. For both baseline FE and ME models I also include interactions between the treatment and all individual-level covariates to guard against potential confounding due to individual-level treatment effect heterogeneity. I then incorporate into the ME model a number of additional covariates, some of which showed significant imbalance between our treatment and control periods. These include, at the individual level, a categorical measure of wealth, whether the respondent voted in the last election (in April 2014), a dichotomous variable asking respondents whether they had ever been on pilgrimage (*hajj*), and two variables measuring response quality: the number of missing responses recorded for each respondent and survey completion time (in seconds).²⁸ At the district level, I further include controls for population density, a dichotomous variable for whether the district

²⁵ Fitting null multilevel models for each identity category also points to strong evidence of nonzero between-district variance, as can be seen in fig. B1. Eleven individual provinces are surveyed, in addition to the 29 districts (omitting Kurdish provinces).

²⁶ This is because of so-called partial pooling, whereby unreliable estimates drawn from groups with a small number of observations are shrunk toward the overall mean.

²⁷ Results are substantively identical when including random slopes for treatment and sect at the province level. Introducing random slopes at both province and district levels is highly computationally demanding and explains little additional variance. I opt here to include slopes and intercepts at the district level because this is the level at which ecological variables are measured and the level at which the treatment is understood to operate.

²⁸ In separate models, I included a categorical variable measuring employment status. This is omitted for the main analyses as it contains a large number (approx. 300) of missing responses, thus substantially reducing the effective sample size.

is urban/rural, and a (square rooted) measure of the distance from the district to Mosul, as well as interactions between the treatment and all individual- and district-level variables in the baseline models.²⁹ Full wordings of the survey items and details of the district-level measures are included in the online appendix. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis are displayed in table C1 (tables B1, B2, and C1 are available online).

Recent scholarship recommends employing matching procedures as a preprocessing technique before any parametric estimation (Ho et al. 2007). Here, I elect to use entropy balancing (Hainmueller 2012), which achieves superior balance, while reducing model dependency and increasing efficiency when compared to other alternatives. Entropy balancing is specifically recommended for binary treatments and also has the advantage that resulting sample weights (similar to conventional survey weights) can be easily incorporated into most standard statistical models. Information from the known sample moments of the control group are used to inform the reweighting procedure such that the control group matches the treatment group exactly on the prespecified set of moments.³⁰ Figure B3 benchmarks the entropy balancing procedure against various alternative matching procedures. In what follows, I use entropy balancing in all of the main analyses, matching on the first moment for all covariates in the baseline models.³¹

RESULTS

Main Results

Given that very few respondents report identifying with region or community, I focus attention first on the three most common identity items: nation, Arab, and Islam. The baseline FE and ME models include just the six variables on which the sample is balanced: individual-level age, gender, and college education and district-level ethnic demographics, prehistories of violence, and density

²⁹ Distance is measured as the straight line distance between the centroid of the target district and the centroid of Mosul.

³⁰ We are therefore estimating average treatment effects on the treated here: $(Y^1|Z=1) - (Y^0|Z=1)$.

³¹ Results are consistent when imposing stricter balance constraints. When imposing the strictest balance constraints (i.e., matching on first, second, and third moments for all covariates), convergence sometimes fails. This is to be expected and is an indication that the constraints are unrealistic. The balancing procedure is necessarily limited by the data, and if insufficient controls are available that look like the treatment group observations, the algorithm may break down. If further data collection is not possible, the recommendation in such cases is to relax the balance constraints (Hainmueller 2012). It should be noted that the matching procedure is just a first step in an empirical strategy that guards against confounding by employing matching before and alongside parametric estimation (Ho et al. 2007).

of tribal ties. The full regression results for both balanced and unbalanced samples are displayed in table 1.

We see that the fall of Mosul has a pronounced effect on patterns of identification, and these differ systematically depending on the ethnicity of the respondent. After the fall of Mosul, Shi'is were significantly more likely to identify with the nation, while Sunnis were significantly more like to cleave to an Arab identity, in line with the predictions of hypotheses 1 and 2. These results are consistent across both the FE and ME models.³² Irrespective of ethnicity, the fall of Mosul had no effect on Islamic identification. Given that we see little effect of the fall of Mosul on Islamic identification, I restrict attention in what follows to the national and Arab identity categories.³³

To determine the significance of an interaction in the probability metric, it is necessary to calculate the marginal predicted mean for each identity outcome (Mize 2019; Long and Mustillo 2021). In the top panel of figure 8 I display predictions for our national and Arab identity items across the FE and ME models. We see that the fall of Mosul led to an increase in national identification among Shi'is of approximately 10 percentage points and an increase in Arab identification among Sunnis of approximately 15–20 percentage points. Subsequent models adjust for the additional covariates described above. Regression results for these models are shown in table B1. The first of these models includes a series of interactions between the treatment and all individual-level and district-level covariates; the second adds individual-level measures of voting, religious behavior, and response quality as well as district-level controls for population density, urban/rural characteristics, and distance to Mosul. We see that after the fall of Mosul Shi'is tend to identify more with the nation, and Sunnis less. Conversely, Sunnis identify more with an Arab identity, while Shi'i attachment to Arab identity remains unchanged. The increase in national identification for Shi'is nonetheless shrinks in size across later models (ME 2 and ME 3).³⁴ I display the predicted margins for each outcome for these additional models in figure B4.

³² A comparison of coefficients in these tables may lead to confusion as some seem to reverse sign. This is because the FE model includes province treatment interactions, meaning the treatment “main effect” and interaction are describing the effects in the base category province. Figure 8 displays predicted probabilities where province is set to observed values, providing a clearer comparison.

³³ In the online appendix, I conduct further tests on the Islamic identity dimension. I find little evidence of social desirability driving these results. Instead, it appears that security threats made alternative identity categories more salient, and the push factors outweighed the pull of religious identity. It is nonetheless notable, in this regard, that psychological security is not sought in Islam. In the same section of the online appendix, I assess whether Arab identification actually encloses a latent sectarian dimension, and I find little evidence to support this interpretation.

³⁴ Note in model ME 3 I remove random coefficients, as they explain little additional variance while multiplying model parameters.

TABLE 1
FIXED EFFECTS AND MIXED EFFECTS LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS FOR THREE MAIN IDENTITY ITEMS: BALANCED SAMPLES

	FIXED EFFECTS						MIXED EFFECTS					
	National			Arab			Islamic			National		
	Coef.	SE		Coef.	SE		Coef.	SE		Coef.	SE	
Treatment	.316	.621		2.011**	.730	−.550	−.550	.628		−.931*	.453	
Shi'i	−.238	.331		−.408	.503	.552	.552	.482		−.118	.281	
Treatment × Shi'i	1.185**	.433		−1.200+	.638	−.677	−.677	.594		1.168*	.456	
Age	.001	.009		−.003	.012	.010	.010	.008		.001	.008	
Female	−.458*	.223		−.103	.302	.686**	.686**	.233		−.441***	.057	
College education	−.244	.406		−.168	.552	.771*	.771*	.387		−.239+	.144	
% Shi'i	.012	.013		−.033+	.019	.011	.011	.017		.023**	.008	
Prehistory violence	.005	.013		.033	.021	−.044*	−.044*	.018		.015	.018	
Tribal ties	.008	.007		.015	.011	−.022**	−.022**	.008		.004	.007	
Constant	−3.368*	1.575		−5.272*	2.521	3.984*	3.984*	1.973		−2.097+	1.220	
Var(intercept: province)										.950*	.457	
Var(treatment: district)										.286	.256	
Var(Shi'i: district)										.000	.000	
Var(intercept: district)										.038	.105	
Province fixed effects	✓			✓			✓					
Province × treatment	✓			✓			✓			✓		
Treatment × individual controls	✓			✓			✓			✓		
Treatment/sect random slopes												

+ $P < .1$.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

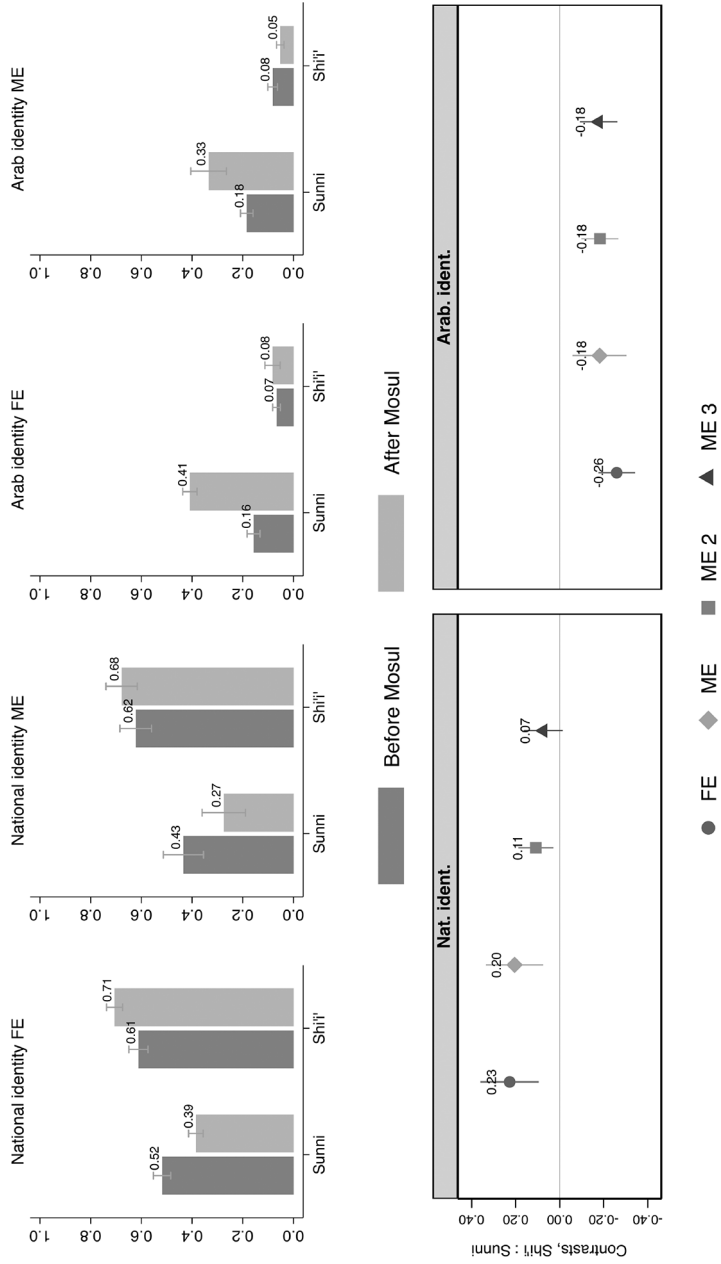


FIG. 8.—*Top*, Predictive margins on national and Arab identity items across FE and ME baseline models. *Bottom*, Contrasts of marginal predicted means across all model specifications.

To determine whether the treatment still has a significant and substantively important effect, we can calculate the contrasts of the marginal predicted means for each of our identity outcomes in each model specification (Mize 2019). Identity cleavages—understood as the difference in the proportion of each ethnic group identifying with a given outcome—may widen or narrow. And widening or narrowing might result from one group moving in one direction or both groups moving in opposite directions. By calculating the contrast of the marginal predicted means, we are able to answer whether, all else being equal, the difference in the proportion of Shi'is and Sunnis identifying with the nation/Arab after the fall of Mosul is significantly different from the difference in the proportion of Shi'is and Sunnis identifying with the nation/Arab before the fall of Mosul. Margin contrasts are thus measuring second differences and are the appropriate metric in which to determine whether the fall of Mosul widens or narrows identity cleavages. Contrasts are displayed in the bottom panel of figure 8. Taken together, the second differences are positive for national identification and negative for Arab identification. In other words, after the fall of Mosul, Shi'is are more likely than Sunnis to identify with the nation than they were before the fall of Mosul, while Sunnis are more likely to identify as Arab. For national identification, the substantive size of this effect is approximately 10 and approximately 7 percentage points in the ME 2 and ME 3 models, respectively. In the final model, this difference is only significant at the 10% level and is driven by decreased Sunni identification with the nation. This most restrictive model suggests, then, that overall differences in national identification resulted from decreased Sunni identification with the nation. As for identification with an Arab identity, Shi'is are approximately 18 percentage points less likely than Sunnis to identify as Arab after the fall of Mosul across all ME specifications. In summary, we have strong evidence that the fall of Mosul widened existing identity cleavages between Shi'i and Sunni Iraqis.

Average identity responses at the level of ethnic groups may, however, mask subethnic heterogeneity in identity responses. I hypothesize above that in tribal regions, which saw significant mobilization after the fall of Mosul, Sunni responses will differ systematically. I test this hypothesis on the subsample of Sunni respondents, including an interaction between the treatment indicator and our measure of tribal ties in the same FE and ME baseline model specifications as above.³⁵ We see that Sunnis in densely tribal regions become markedly more likely to rally behind a national identity.

³⁵ Here, I include only random slopes for the treatment, as the sample includes only Sunni respondents. Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2019) warn that multiple interactions may violate assumptions of linearity and common support. I check this in fig. B6 and find that there is some but not major deviation from linearity and the marginal probabilities do not lack common support. Rerunning the same analysis but including binned categories for

TABLE 2
FIXED EFFECTS AND MIXED EFFECTS LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS FOR NATIONAL
IDENTIFICATION WITH TREATMENT $\times$ TRIBAL TIES INTERACTION, SUNNI SUBSAMPLE

	FIXED EFFECTS		MIXED EFFECTS	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Treatment	-5.030	3.416	-8.801***	1.834
Tribal ties	-.027	.018	-.015**	.005
Treatment $\times$ tribal ties	.035*	.017	.046***	.010
Age	.028	.020	.019***	.003
Female	-.369	.497	-.219*	.096
College education	-.364	.675	-.250	.260
% Shi'i	.040	.036	.021*	.010
Prehistory violence	-.025	.029	.047 ⁺	.028
Constant	2.903	4.062	.509	1.582
Var(intercept: province)			.000	.000
Var(treatment: district)			.000	.000
Var(intercept: district)			.344 ⁺	.188
Province fixed effects	✓			
Province $\times$ treatment	✓			
Treatment $\times$ individual controls . . .	✓		✓	
Treatment random slopes			✓	

⁺ $P < .1$.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

Regression results for both FE and ME models are displayed in table 2. Figure 9 plots the predicted probability of Sunnis identifying with the nation before and after the fall of Mosul by the density of tribal ties in the district where they live. The FE models are estimating within-province treatment effects, and within-province treatment variance is considerably lower than overall treatment variance.³⁶ This leads to wider confidence intervals than the ME models, which incorporate both between- and within-unit variation. We see that before the fall of Mosul, Sunnis in tribal regions were markedly less likely to identify with the nation. This is consistent with the persistent marginalization of these regions under the Maliki regime, which may have engendered reduced attachment to the nation. But after the fall of Mosul, in line with hypothesis 3, this effect reverses as Sunnis in these regions rally strongly behind the nation. This result holds across all subsequent ME model specifications, which add the same set of additional covariates as ME models 2 and 3 above (see table B2 and fig. B5).

low, medium, and high terciles of tribal ties, we see that the same substantive conclusions obtain.

³⁶ Only two provinces are in both the treatment and the control.

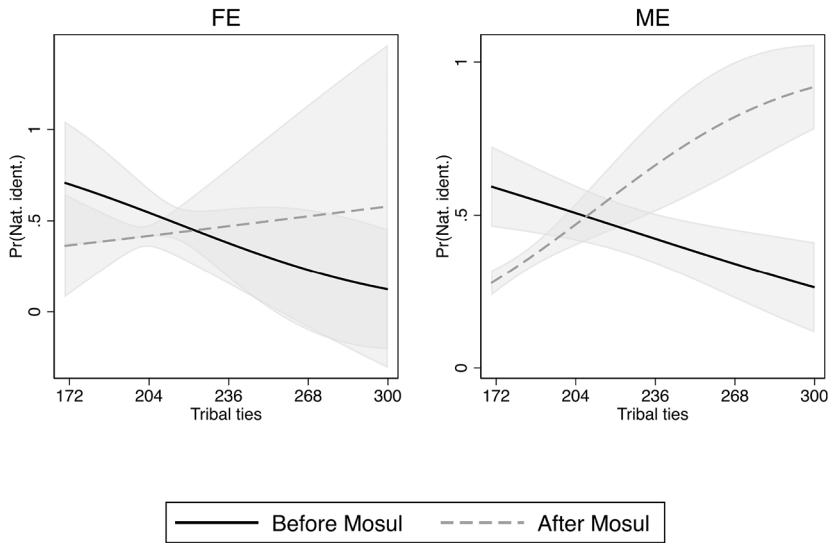


FIG. 9.—Predicted probability of Sunni national identification before and after the fall of Mosul by density of tribal ties.

Robustness and Alternative Explanations

Thus far, the article has proceeded on the assumption that changes in identity responses are attributable to the fall of Mosul and the mobilization that ensued in its wake. A violation of this assumption would occur if other unrelated trends or external events were influencing patterns of identification. In the initial checks described above, we observed no obvious preexisting trends in security concerns or identification. As a further check, we can conduct placebo treatment tests by recoding our treatment variable at an arbitrary point within our control group sample. If it is the case that shifts in identification are attributable to the fall of Mosul and not any other exogenous event or preexisting time trend, we should see no effect for the placebo treatment. The treatment variable is coded 0/1 at the empirical median time point of the control group (June 6). This gives us an observation window of May 28–June 9, 2014, and has the advantage of producing placebo control and treatment groups of comparable size.³⁷ As above, figure B8 plots marginal predicted means for the placebo treatment sect interaction for the FE and ME baseline models. We see no effect for the placebo treatment.

One disadvantage of this approach is that we have only a short observation window in which to detect any temporal confounding. Further, this test

³⁷ This is the recommended approach in “unexpected events” and regression discontinuity designs with temporal forcing variables (Imbens and Lemieux 2008; Muñoz et al. 2020).

will only be able to detect the influence of prior events or preexisting trends. We may, however, wish to gauge whether other international events after June 10 had any influence on our outcomes separate from the fall of Mosul. Israeli military operations in the West Bank on June 12 and the beginning of the FIFA World Cup on the same day represent two external events that could potentially influence the answers respondents gave.³⁸ I therefore also carry out a placebo falsification test on a separate sample from Jordan, which was in the field over a period similar to our Iraq sample (June 7–18). I also analyze responses to several additional survey items. I detail these tests in the online appendix. There is little evidence that incidental simultaneous events represent a threat to inference.

Collateral events—events that are related to the fall of Mosul—may yet affect the results. The shortness of the observation window again makes it difficult to disentangle the individual impact of events that came in the wake of Mosul's fall. The claim in this article, of course, is that the fall of Mosul, and attendant tribal mobilization efforts, impinged on identity in important ways. In this, I recognize, and explicitly theorize, how a threatening event as well as its downstream consequences may affect identity outcomes. But there are other theoretically plausible channels through which some part of these effects might run. Here, candidates include the formal entry of Iran into the war effort and the appeal of Nouri al-Maliki for the United States to conduct air strikes. I evaluate these alternative pathways in the online appendix and find limited evidence that they represent credible alternatives.

Two potential objections to the finding for renewed national identification in tribal regions are also worthy of consideration. It could be argued first that the ISIS threat was simply perceived differently in these regions. Tribal groups had previously switched allegiances after suffering victimization at the hands of AQI (Staniland 2012), meaning that ISIS was likely perceived as especially threatening in tribal regions. This implies that differential threat perception, rather than exposure to interethnic cooperation, may provide a better explanation for the findings. However, tribal regions were no more likely to perceive heightened threat after the fall of Mosul.³⁹ There is also an important distinction to be made between patterns of alliance among combatants and the identity loyalties of populations. The decision of tribal groups to ally with the ISF and PMF was likely borne of instrumental considerations. But it is not obvious why the same logics underpinning the decision of tribal forces to join ranks with state-allied forces also explain why citizens would identify with the nation. More likely, and consistent with existing work by Christia (2012), is that while military alliances have instrumental

³⁸ On the effect of shared attention to the football World Cup on national identity, see Depetris-Chauvin, Durante, and Campante (2020).

³⁹ I detail analyses gauging perceived threat in tribal regions in the online appendix.

foundations, they are capable of reshaping the identity loyalties of affected communities. This leads to the second potential objection: tribal ties may simply provide a conduit for the politicization of identity. That is, Sunnis rallied behind a national identity in line with the strategic alliance decisions of tribal elites. The observed effects for those residing in tribal areas would, according to this version, result not from exposure to cooperation but from the tactical alliances forged by tribal heads. In its foregrounding of the role of elite signaling, this version is distinct from the account advanced in this article. But it is also consonant with the theory I advance in another way. Here, I argue that it is exposure to achieved cooperation that mediated the observed effects. The alternative account has it that signals of support from tribal elites for the ISF and PMF mediated observed effects. Common to both accounts is the role of cooperation. And it is important to stress that achieved cooperation may exert its effect through either direct or indirect exposure. What matters, in other words, is knowledge of cooperation. Given the limitations of the data, distinguishing general exposure to cooperation from elite signals of cooperation remains a task for future research.

As detailed in the online appendix, statistical power tests suggest that the full observation window is required for the detection of meaningful effect sizes. This precludes the use of additional time dummies. Given that we lack the statistical power to disentangle the discrete effects of collateral events, the treatment effects reported in this article should therefore be understood as, in part, compound effects of both the fall of Mosul and events observed in its wake. And here it is worth reflecting on the multidimensional nature of the Mosul treatment. In this article, I stress the twin role of prior attachment and achieved cooperation for understanding the effects of the fall of Mosul at the group and subgroup levels. Given that we are interested in the capacity of war to unite population groups, this is the most appropriate level of analysis.⁴⁰ For individuals within groups, the perception of, and exposure to, the treatment will likely have differed. But absent panel data or relevant pre-treatment covariates, we are unable to explore individual-level heterogeneity without introducing posttreatment bias (Montgomery et al. 2018). This “imprecise treatment” problem is a common concern in unexpected event designs but is difficult to overcome without additional data (Muñoz et al. 2020). While natural experiments provide a means to gauge the external validity of laboratory findings, the requirement to reverse engineer the experimental setting means they suffer from some imprecision in instrument design. Recent work points to several cognitive pathways through which threat may exert its effect (Feinstein 2016). Identifying these specific individual-level pathways will be a task for future research.

⁴⁰ And we observe heightened perception of domestic insecurity irrespective of sect. I detail these analyses in the online appendix.

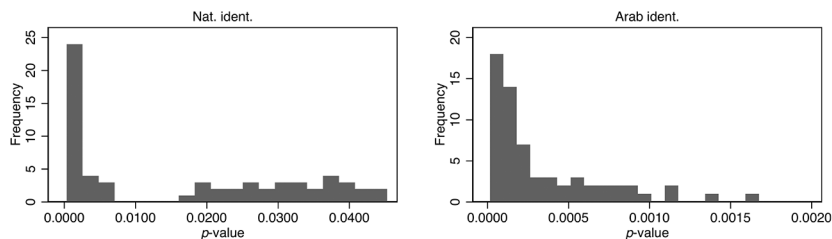


FIG. 10.—Histograms of significance for Shi'i/Sunni marginal predicted mean contrasts before and after the fall of Mosul for national and Arab identity items. Sixty-three separate models represent every possible combination of additional covariates in baseline ME model.

Finally, results may be dependent on the combination of covariates selected for inclusion in each of the models (Young and Holsteen 2017). As a final check on the validity of the results, I estimate 63 further models for each of the national and Arab identity outcomes. Here, I take the baseline ME model from table 1 and reestimate the model by adding every combination of additional covariates included in subsequent models.⁴¹ As above, I then calculate the contrast of marginal predicted means for Sunni and Shi'i respondents before and after the fall of Mosul. In figure 10, I visualize *P*-values for the marginal contrasts across all of these models.⁴² Across all models these contrasts are significant at the 5% level, thus boosting confidence that observed differences between sects after the fall of Mosul are not sensitive to model specification.

DISCUSSION

This article represents, to date, the only quasi-experimental test of identity shift within a major conflict episode. I find that threat of war and attendant mobilization efforts do have profound impacts on identity loyalties. But war did not make the nation. In fact, overall it had disintegrative effects: inter-group distances in identity attachments between Sunni and Shi'i Iraqis increased after the fall of Mosul. Groups that were already counterposed moved further apart, as Shi'is rallied behind a national identity in the face of threat while Sunnis cleaved to an Arab identity. But this is not the whole story. Where common collaboration took place, Sunnis also rallied behind the nation. Ethnic cleavages, then, may widen at the onset of war. But alliances forged endogenous to war can generate national loyalties anew.

⁴¹ I do not include random slopes for treatment and sect, as this lead to a too computationally and time intensive estimation procedure.

⁴² I also estimated these models on our unbalanced samples. Consistent with the findings of Hainmueller (2012), we see that entropy reweighting substantially reduces model dependency.

That war has these effects may not confound existing theory. But to date any predictions drawn from theory have only been tested in laboratory settings or have relied on support from largely correlational evidence taken from postwar surveys. Security risks normally preclude the fielding of surveys in conflict zones. And the unexpectedness of conflict outbreak means that, by definition, it is not possible to organize the fielding of a survey to coincide with the onset of war. The empirical strategy I employ therefore relies on an extremely rare source of data: a survey in the field at the onset of conflict. And this has made possible the elaboration of a causal framework for examining the identity consequences of conflict in a natural setting.

Notwithstanding the robustness procedures already discussed, the analysis still suffers from several acknowledged limitations. While the exogenous variation I leverage in this article provides us with a unique identification tool for assessing identity dynamics, it only provides us with a snapshot of the immediate aftermath of the fall of Mosul. If identity is endogenous to conflict, it could equally well be subject to endogenous reversals and fluctuations over the course of a conflict cycle. This would be consistent with the theory I advance but cannot be assessed with the data available. Second, the outcome variable I employ imposes a zero-sum character on identity: respondents are able only to choose one identity attachment. A note on interpretation is therefore in order. One should not interpret changes in identity attachment as implying the abandonment of a given identity or its replacement by another. Instead, I follow existing theoretical work that conceptualizes identity as a multilevel phenomenon the elements of which may exhibit varying salience over time rather than ever going away (Wimmer 2008). And given the limitations of the survey question, the article remains silent on the degree of attachment implied by observed responses. Finally, two of the ecological measures used date from 2003 to 2004. War causes demographic change and disrupts social networks (Weidmann and Salehyan 2013). This raises the possibility that inferences are affected by measurement error. A related objection is that the proxy variable measuring tribal ties may not be capturing zones of mobilization and that the brevity of the observation window would have precluded any significant exposure to such mobilization.⁴³ To address these concerns, I provide a more detailed account of tribal mobilization in the next section.

Sunni Tribal Forces

We can gain a better picture of the effects of Sunni tribal mobilization through a focus on four districts: Tikrit, Samarra, al-Khalis, and Ba'quba.

⁴³ Reliable measures of prehistories of Sahwa mobilization, e.g., are not available. And it is also not clear how accurately such a measure would capture tribal mobilization in 2014.

The first two are located in the Salah ad-Din province; the second two in Diyala. These districts share an experience of prior conflict with the AQI during the 2006–8 Sunni insurgency and were similarly targeted by ISIS in the period leading to the fall of Mosul (see Cordesman 2008; Lewis 2013). They were also host to significant protests against the Maliki government during 2013 (Wyer 2013). Samarra is now ethnically mixed, as are al-Khalis and Ba'quba; Tikrit remains majority Sunni (Izady 2015). All are districts with a high density of tribal ties (in the top quartile). They also saw significant tribal mobilization in the aftermath of the fall of Mosul. In sum, these districts are similar across several dimensions. Most important for our purposes is that the districts in Salah ad-Din were surveyed before the fall of Mosul, while those in Diyala were surveyed afterward.⁴⁴ This provides us with the opportunity to investigate at a more granular level the plausibility of claims relating to tribal mobilization.

Figure 11 locates the four districts on a map of Iraq. All four districts fell on the path of the ISIS advance toward Baghdad.⁴⁵ Only the Diyala districts were interviewed after the fall of Mosul and after tribal mobilization efforts had begun. The location of recorded tribal mobilizations are also depicted in figure 11. Clashes in Diyala were concentrated in the northern areas of Miqdadiyah and Udham after tribal forces mobilized to defend against ISIS encroachment beyond the towns of As-Sa'adiyah and Jalawla from June 12 onward.⁴⁶ The head of the security forces in Diyala announced on June 12 that they had received voluntary support from thousands of residents, particularly tribes.⁴⁷ Salah ad-Din saw significant tribal mobilization too. On June 13, tribal forces from the Albu Faraj and Juburi mobilized alongside the Iraqi Army in defense of al-Mu'tasim, a town south of Samarra.⁴⁸ In subsequent days, tribal forces alongside the Iraqi Army would also mobilize to defend the towns of Dujail and Dhuluiyah from ISIS advances.⁴⁹ This mobilization would gain speed in ensuing months as ISIS began targeting tribal forces and opposition sheikhs across both northern and southern areas of Salah ad-Din province.

⁴⁴ Salah ad-Din districts were surveyed June 4–10; Diyala districts, June 17–21.

⁴⁵ Samarra had been targeted on June 5 by ISIS, but government forces managed to repel the attack.

⁴⁶ See <https://www.almadapress.com/view.php?cat=32727> (last accessed July 15, 2020).

⁴⁷ See <https://al-akhbar.com/Arab/33010> (last accessed July 15, 2020). Later, by October 2014, the governor of Diyala had announced the formal agreement of four principal Sunni tribal groupings present in the region—the Dulaim, Juburi, Khazraj, and Izza—to assist in the fight against ISIS. See <https://tinyurl.com/alqudsoc14>.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/103158/alsumaria-news/ar> (last accessed July 15, 2020).

⁴⁹ See <https://www.almadapress.com/view.php?cat=32983> (last accessed July 15, 2020).

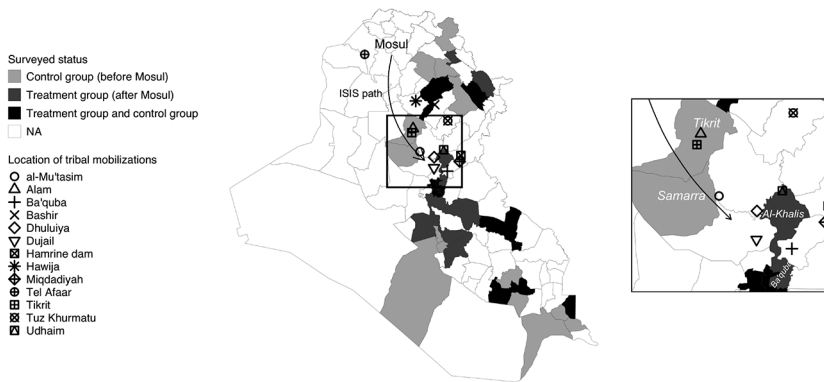


FIG. 11.—Survey map of districts on path of ISIS advance with location of tribal mobilization

How did individuals in these districts identify? In the Salah ad-Din provinces, interviewed before the fall of Mosul, just 9% of the 60 Sunni respondents identified with the Iraqi nation; in Diyala, interviewed after the fall of Mosul and nearby tribes had mobilized, 72% of the 48 Sunni respondents identified with the nation. Suggestively, we also see that Sunnis in densely tribal districts express more trust in the military after the fall of Mosul. Renewed national identification, in other words, may run at least in part through increased trust in national security forces.⁵⁰ Inferences from descriptive statistics of small numbers should, of course, be treated with caution. They are nonetheless consistent with the broader theoretical framework advanced in this article.

While the survey evidence used in this article only provides a short observation window, we do know that this tribal mobilization persisted over time. In the six months after the fall of Mosul, anti-ISIS tribal groupings would go on to participate in over 140 separate combat events alongside the Iraqi

⁵⁰ The size of this increase is about one-third of a standard deviation. When regressing trust in the military on an interaction between the treatment and tribal ties for Sunnis, including other covariates from the baseline ME model, Sunnis in more densely tribal districts are significantly more likely to express trust in the military than they were before the fall of Mosul. Of course, Diyala may have had higher levels of national identification to begin with. Survey data from 2011 provide us with one way to check this. Tikrit and Ba'quba were surveyed in 2011 as part of the Middle Eastern Values Study (see Moaddel 2020). Questionnaires and data are available at <https://preview.tinyurl.com/MEVSdata>. A question similar to that in the Arab Transformations data asks respondents which identity best describes them. The wording of this questions is as follows: "Which of the following best describes you?: 1. Above all, I am Iraqi; 2. Above all, I am Muslim; 3. Above all, I am an Arab." Here, Sunni respondents in Tikrit are actually more likely than their coethnics in Ba'quba to identify with the nation (58% vs. 40%).

Army and often the Shi'i-dominated PMF (ISW 2014).⁵¹ In a telling episode that took place on November 2, 2014, ISIS would attack and kidnap tens of members of the Juburi tribe in Alam, east of Tikrit, after youths from the region had torn down ISIS banners and rehoisted the Iraqi national flag. In the summer of 2015, the recapture of Tikrit was achieved by a combined force of the Iraqi Army, PMF, and Sunni tribal volunteers.

Over time, a part of the tribal forces would be integrated into the PMF under the name of the Tribal Mobilization Forces. Acknowledging these episodes of interethnic cooperation is, of course, not to minimize the sectarian abuses committed in the aftermath of this event and others (HRW 2015; Mansour 2016). Nor is it to suggest that all Sunni tribal groups cooperated with the ISF and PMF from the onset of conflict (Gartenstein-Ross 2015; Rudolf 2020). Rather, it is to recognize that, as much as ISIS may have wished to stoke an ethnic civil war between Iraqi Sunni and Shi'i communities, this did not materialize. Instead, significant numbers of Sunnis, predominantly from tribal groups, mobilized in defense of Iraq: by November 2016, estimates suggest that Sunni tribal fighters in the PMF counted several tens of thousands (Gaston 2018; Haddad 2018; Rudolf 2020). And as the war progressed, both Shi'i and Sunni Iraqis would increasingly perceive Iraq as a unified country (NDI 2014, 2015, 2017). In 2017, 78% of Iraqis agreed that "the fight against ISIS has helped unify the people of Iraq" (NDI 2017).⁵²

Generalizability

What do these findings tell us more generally? After all, Iraq has several particularities that may limit the external validity of the findings. Iraq in 2014 had experienced over a decade of foreign occupation, and significant interethnic conflict, itself exacerbated by the external interference of Iran. It was also bordered by Syria—a country mired in domestic conflict whose belligerents were exported to fight on the Iraqi front. And Iraqi Sunni Arabs had also already faced down predecessors of ISIS in the form of AQI, forging cross-ethnic alliances in the process.

Yet the case of Iraq in 2014 still holds out clear generalizable lessons. Here, it is worth restating three basic features of the conflict. First, before the onset of civil war, Iraq had an ethnically exclusionary state, suffering

⁵¹ These figures represent my own calculations from coding events included in the ISW-produced "Iraq Situation Reports." Further illustrative examples of Sunni tribal mobilization in the main text derive, unless otherwise stated, from the same source material. Tribes and clans participating in these anti-ISIS efforts included the Abbasiyen, Albu Alwan, Albu Fahad, Albu Ghanim, Albu Issa, Albu Khas, Albu Mahal, Albu Nimr, Albu Rayash, Albu Salman, Alus, Bani Aziz, Bayatin, Dulaim, Izza, Jaghaifa, Jisat, Juburi, Jumailat, Karabla, Khazraj, Korawi, Lihib, Mowali, Sabawi, Shammar, and Ubaidi.

⁵² Here, polling estimates are comparing over-time changes beginning March 2014.

from considerable state weakness. Second, after war broke out, recruitment across ethnic lines took place as Sunni tribal forces responded to regime appeals to mobilize against a force claiming to represent their own coethnics. Third, this mobilization relied in part on organizational vehicles—in the form of Sahwa groups—left over from previous episodes of conflict. The findings in this article inform current understandings of each of these dimensions.

Existing literature demonstrates that ethnic exclusion is a key correlate of conflict and that exclusion hampers nation building (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Wimmer 2018). In just the last 10 years, we can see evidence of the effects of ethnic exclusion in the Kachin Rebellion in northern Myanmar and Syrian civil war of 2011, the independence struggle of South Sudan that ended in the same year, and the 2013 civil war within the new borders South Sudan. This article demonstrates that exclusion also limits the capacity of war to unite. Excluded groups will have low prior attachment to the nation, making it unlikely that they will seek refuge in a national identity when threatened. In Iraq it was principally Shi'is who rallied behind the nation. If war makes the nation, then, it likely does so only for the group in power.

Previous contributions have further shown that cross-ethnic alliance is a common feature of domestic conflict, even in exclusionary polities (Kalyvas 2006; Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour 2012; Aliyev 2019). Again, examples from the last decade are many. Tuareg rebels allied with France and the Bamako state against members of their own ethnic confederation and aligned Islamist forces in Mali, Russian-speaking Ukrainians volunteered in the fight against the separatist ambitions of their own coethnics in East Ukraine, and Somali Islamists loyal to Ahmed Madobe split to fight with Kenyan and Ethiopian forces against members of their own Ogaden clan who had aligned with Al-Shabaab. Commonly, it is instrumental alliances between combatants that constitute the focus of study (Kalyvas 2008; Christia 2012). What this article demonstrates is that these alliances are consequential not just for the conduct of war but for the identity loyalties of populations. When such cooperation is achieved, I show, ethnic cleavages may narrow as formerly antagonistic groups rally in common behind a national identity.

The effect of cooperation on population loyalties points, finally, toward the iterative process of nation building through war. We know that state response, and the provision of institutional and organizational mechanisms for recruitment across ethnic lines, is a key variable in understanding how alliances form and wars subsequently develop (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Staniland 2012). A parallel literature in comparative macrosociology argues that war helps lay the institutional foundations of early nation building (Tilly 1975; Mann 1986). This article demonstrates one way these arguments might together translate to contemporary conflicts. In Iraq, Maliki responded to conflict outbreak by appealing for mobilization across ethnic lines. And institutional forms inherited from previous conflict aided in the cross-ethnic mobilization of state forces

and Sunni tribes. I show that these alliance are consequential for securing the identity loyalties of national communities. We therefore see how the alliance decisions of states, as well as organizational institutions that emerged in and through previous episodes of conflict, can together influence the longer term process of nation building through war. Thus, if existing research demonstrates that cross-ethnic alliances help foster nation building in peacetime (Wimmer 2018), this article demonstrates that they also matter for promoting loyalty to the nation in times of war.

CONCLUSION

Writing in the late 1970s, Hana Batatu, a pioneering historical sociologist of the Middle East, argued that, much as in the rest of the world, the combined effects of demographic change, education, state centralization, and communication technologies had helped foster a national imaginary in Iraq. However, Batatu was to qualify this vision of a slowly sedimenting national identity. While these processes mattered, the ability of Iraqis to imagine themselves members of a unified Iraq was not infrequently propelled forward by major crises and episodes of mass mobilization: “it should be borne in mind,” he wrote, “that what is becoming the Iraqi community has also grown in crises, in moments of great danger and common suffering, in the tremors of agitated masses and their outbursts of anger” (Batatu 1978, p. 36). Citing multiple instances of collective mobilization and political crisis that preceded Iraq’s eventual independence, he forecast that, should Iraq maintain its territorial integrity, “the Uprising of 1920, the War of 1941, the *Wathbah* of 1948, the *Intifāḍah* of 1952, and the Revolution of 1958, though not free of divisive aspects, will be seen as stages in the progress of Iraq towards national coherence” (p. 36).

The fall of Mosul to ISIS represents the most recent addition to this inventory of transformative events. Whether it will also represent a step toward national coherence is less certain. The findings in this article point instead to the role of conflict in widening identity cleavages. In conditions of ethnic exclusion, it is the ethnic group in power that rallies behind the nation under threat of war. However, the findings also demonstrate the potential for cross-ethnic national identification in conditions of common inclusion. Where cooperation is achieved between groups, war has the potential to forge national loyalties anew, even in exclusionary contexts. The identity consequences of war, in other words, are multidirectional and contingent on the dynamics of conflict outbreak. Further work should seek to elaborate on and extend these findings. Does territorial threat always exacerbate identity cleavages, or can credible national mobilization efforts overcome such dangers? What are the determinants of interethnic cooperation in the context of conflict? To what extent are identity loyalties subject to variation over the conflict cycle? What

are the consequences of identity shifts for social attitudes? More broadly, given the nature of the phenomenon in question, and the growing availability of survey data, scholars would do well to locate and exploit similar sources of exogenous variation. Wars are convulsive, destructive, transformative events. Making use of their eventful quality allows us to ask not just why wars occur but what their felt consequences might be.

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