THE ISIS FILES

Policing as Rebel Governance: The Islamic State Police

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Abstract
This paper holds that ISIS employed a substantial, administratively cohesive, operable police organization that took care of ‘ordinary’ public order and law enforcement tasks. While the Departments of Public Security (emnī) and Religious Compliance (hisba) have been at the center of most media coverage and popular literature on the Islamic State, ISIS’s policing capacities through its Islamic State Police (shurta) wing have not been studied so far. This paper adds to the literature by taking stock of the manner in which ISIS set up a working police force, designed rules of governance, developed ensuing practices of enforcement, and engendered support. In doing so, the authors situate the paper’s findings within the broader academic debate on governance by non-state actors. This also opens up the uneasy but highly relevant question of ISIS statehood, which can be related to the concept of ‘rebel governance.’ Such an approach offers a number of important policy implications—including a strategic understanding of ISIS’s sweeping initial successes—by addressing the ways in which ISIS generated and sustained public authority and legitimacy through a variety of police practices.

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Introduction and research questions

The starting point for this paper is that the Islamic State (ISIS) ran an effective rebel government on the ground for over four years. ISIS’s rank and file consisted of violent actors, and the group’s reputation for violent coercion and brutality is well known. Yet, the group’s leadership was also capable of seizing and governing a vast territory, often called the ‘Sunni triangle’ in Iraq and large parts of North-Eastern Syria (a territory of 45,000 square kilometers), and gained support for its rule on the ground. ISIS projected extensive governmental structures and sophisticated administrative practices to rule the civil population in these areas.

One of the pressing questions that remains is how ISIS seemed to establish such a sophisticated form of administration and provide considerable public goods to civilians, which were supported or at least obeyed by large sections of the local population. This paper holds that ISIS employed a substantial, administratively cohesive, operable police organization that took care of ‘ordinary’ public order and law enforcement tasks. While the Departments of Public Security (emnî) and Religious Compliance (hisba) have been at the center of most media coverage and popular literature on the Islamic State, ISIS’s policing capacities through its Islamic State Police (shurta) wing have evaded scrutiny so far. This paper moves beyond ISIS’ foreign fighters and high profile operations and attacks and focuses instead on the residents in the area and the way they interacted with the shurta.

This paper will review the manner in which ISIS set up a working police force, designed rules of governance, developed ensuing practices of enforcement, and engendered support. In doing so, the authors situate the paper’s findings within the wider academic debate on governance by non-state actors, especially related to the concept of ‘rebel governance.’ It will do so on the basis of new, significant and rare empirical material: ISIS police reports, retrieved from the Caliphate, coupled with firsthand interviews with defectors (see below). This approach offers a number of important policy implications—including a strategic understanding of ISIS’s sweeping initial successes—by addressing the ways in which ISIS generated and sustained public authority and legitimacy through a variety of police practices. ISIS not only ‘mimicked’ statehood by creating its own
recognizable symbols, uniforms, ceremonies, and commemorations, it also exerted state control by introducing and enforcing law and order. In line with the existing academic literature on rebel governance, the authors argue that the nature of ISIS’s rebel governance and the way that it ran its police organization can be considered a product of 1) preferences of the ‘rebel leadership’ and 2) ‘their interactions with a wide variety of local and international social and political actors.’

To support that argument, the authors will use the following piece to answer these four research questions:

- How did the Islamic State Police (shurta) fit within ISIS’s design for rebel rule?
- Through what kind of practices were these rules enforced?
- How did citizens respond to various Islamic State Police organizations, their rules, and their practices?
- Can we consider this type of rule efficient governance, with ‘efficient’ understood as ‘working in a well-organized and competent way’, and perhaps even emblematic of statehood?

Our paper will argue that focusing on more mundane police and security practices helps to reveal how ISIS rolled out its rules of governance, particularly how its police stations and the possibility of handing in ‘complaints’ supported its rebel rule. By assessing and analyzing Islamic State Police material, the authors will trace how the shurta followed up on the submitted civil complaints (against fellow citizens, but also against wrongdoings by ISIS officials) and how the Islamic State Police, by doing so, provided de facto sovereignty and even a form of public authority amongst the residents in the area.

We will focus less on the above-mentioned performative practices of gruesome atrocities ISIS staged for public dissemination. Nor will we analyze the level of coercion and open violence with which ISIS responded to transgressions of its rule. One of this paper’s authors, Ahmet Yayla, has written and reported extensively on the practices of intimidation and the techniques of torture ISIS adopted to sustain its rule. While the extent to which the repertoire of atrocities and coercion was common occurrence in
life under ISIS needs reiterating, what is examined within this report are not reports by defectors or techniques of coercion, but rather an inventory and analysis of the practices of rebel governance that helped ISIS to roll out a low-key system of rebel rule on the ground through the deployment of ordinary police practices. Punishments and violence as committed, for example, in the prison system or during interrogation falls outside the scope of this paper – if only because the body of files used comes from another organization (the shurta) and does not disclose these practices. The shurta was no less part of the coercive and terrorist regime created by ISIS, but it had a different role to fulfill within this system, which we will try to unpack below.

The first question – how did the shurta fit within ISIS’s design for rebel rule - will be answered by looking into existing studies on ISIS bodies of police control, as well as interviews conducted with defected ISIS members. The second and third questions will be answered by systematically assessing Islamic State Police files and citizens’ complaints to the police collected by the ISIS Files Project. The last question will be answered using both the data collected for this project and the conceptual framework of rebel governance developed within the academic literature on governance by non-state actors.

The paper is structured as follows: We will first outline our method, both the rebel governance approach, and the way we analyze our sources. (Sections 2 and 3). We will then situate the Islamic State police within the governance system of ISIS and discuss how the Islamic State Police rolled out its law enforcement apparatus – including its rationale, the legal and theological foundations, mission statement, structure, and many other relevant aspects of this instrument of ISIS’s rebel rule (Sections 4 and 5). Section 6 contains the pivotal part of this paper: it maps the interactions between residents and the Islamic State Police on the basis of interviews with defectors and the Islamic State Police’s reports and complaints. This reconstruction enables us to draw inferences about the dynamical relation between ISIS and the residents in the area, including some tentative conclusions about the importance of public order, mediation and day-to-day conflict management for the legitimacy of the Caliphate ‘on the ground’. We will end with some concluding remarks and a response to our
main research question in Section 7: Can we consider the Islamic State Police to be an instrument of operable, efficient rebel governance?

**Method**

This paper seeks to avoid unsupported assertions about the general ‘effectiveness’ of the Islamic State Police or similar metrics made possible by large-n opinion polling or other quantitative fieldwork (which was not possible for various reasons). The authors also stress that any conclusions drawn in this paper relate primarily to the Islamic State Police in Mosul, since all of the retrieved documents originated from that area. Still, existing assessments of both the Islamic State Police’s record in the literature and the data gleaned from the authors’ interviews (see below) lend some preliminary insights as to the question of how citizens talked about ISIS’ governance capabilities, including those of the Islamic State Police. The authors were also able to draw insights about the level of sophistication of the Islamic State Police’s organizational design, which proved to be highly complex. The distinction between how the Islamic State wanted its citizens to perceive and obey its rule and the reported perceptions and attitudes ‘on the ground’ cannot be bridged with the research methods adopted here. However, this paper offers some important indications to understand the Islamic States’ attempt at generating an idea of statehood, gives some first qualitative exploratory findings, and points to future avenues of research.

The authors use a mixed-methods approach in their application of the ‘rebel governance’ framework to the Islamic State. The rebel governance approach is discussed below. Our overall approach to contextualize and analyze the *shurta’s* practice consists of the following elements:

- Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with defectors from the Islamic State, specifically on the workings and activities of the Islamic State Police in order to draw insights into its place within the broader organization and its function within the overall system of ‘rebel rule.’ The interviewees are a combination of a convenience and a purposive sample: they did not come from the same area, represented different units within the Islamic State organization, and had fled the area to live in Turkey. They were interviewed because they had
experienced the Islamic State police’s activities firsthand, had interacted with them, were part of the authors’ network, and were willing to talk. They can therefore not be considered a random sample, but given their level of involvement in the organization, the interviewees can be considered knowledgeable and representative for the higher-level officers from our area of investigation. The interviews were conducted via WhatsApp cellphone application voice calls with two defectors, and each lasted around two hours. The interviews were not audio-recorded due to privacy and security reasons – security considerations the interviewees specifically asked for and made it their condition for speaking out. The authors conducted three follow-up interviews with the interviewees when further input or clarification was needed. The interviewees were assigned to work at various structures of the terrorist organization, but all interacted at some point with the Islamic State Police during the time they spent within the Islamic State.

- Quantitative analysis of files on complaints, protocols and notes collected by the GW ISIS Files Project on local police activities in a number of departments (but mostly from the department in the Nineveh governorate) in order to understand the implementation and results of Islamic State Police practices amongst the citizens living in the territories occupied by the Islamic State.

**Rebel Governance and terrorism**

In recent years, a vivid debate on governance by state and non-state actors has emerged, one that confronts public depictions of terrorists, warlords, or organized criminal networks as pathological criminals running amok, engaging in death and destruction, trafficking or other human rights abuses, and plunder and slaughter. A growing body of research demonstrates that oftentimes armed groups, criminal or otherwise, perform all kinds of governmental practices while simultaneously engaging in heinous and destructive practices. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, for example, paired their predatory practices towards the civilian population with serious and substantial displays of governmental rule, ‘leading to a de facto sovereignty and public authority.’ In the areas occupied by rebel organizations such as the LTTE, rebel groups seize not only social and
economic resources, but also the judiciary and policing tasks typically undertaken (or neglected) by the de jure state.

With ‘de facto sovereignty,’ scholars in the ‘rebel governance’ debate hold that sovereignty is not the mere prerogative of the state, but can be exerted de facto by non-state actors as well – albeit in a formally illegal and unrecognized way.\textsuperscript{10} The scale of such projections of governance runs from the construction of long-term, almost state-like practices of governance by non-state armed groups (e.g. in FARC-occupied areas in Colombia, Hezbollah operating hospitals in Lebanon, or Hamas issuing identity cards in the Gaza Strip) to more geographically and temporally limited forms of rebel governance (e.g. the alleged enforcement of quarantine and imposition of curfews in Brazilian favelas by criminal gangs who fill in where the Brazilian government fails to protect its citizens against the coronavirus).\textsuperscript{11}

In many places, the provision of welfare, security, means of participation, and justice are not (no longer, or never have been) the prerogative of the official, internationally recognized body of the state. In ‘failed states’ in particular, other actors emerge that compete with the formal state in administering security, offering protection, and offering social and utility services to parts of the public. In postcolonial states, for example, terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) play into existing societal cleavages, embedding themselves in areas that have traditionally evaded control from the colonial center (e.g. Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and Cameroon). These groups offer the inhabitants of governance-lacking areas not only concrete services, but also a narrative (religious or tribal) of identity and legitimacy, contrary to that of the (failing) central state authorities.\textsuperscript{12}

Within this debate, the conceptualization of the ‘Caliphate’ as an entity that exerts ‘de facto sovereignty and public authority’ sheds light on why ISIS could seize control of its conquered territory so swiftly and efficiently. Indeed, the conditions were ripe after a war with other insurgent groups in Syria broke out. In this vacuum, ISIS was able to consolidate societal support. Three years later, it had lost most of its
territorial control, but the group remains poised to once more seize control if the conditions for rebel governance should be met again.

Instead of highlighting ISIS’s out-of-area attacks and operations or its gruesome and highly-visible massacres and performances of death and destruction, we focus on what some might perceive as more mundane police and security practices. This paper helps to reveal how ISIS rolled out its rules of governance, through which practices these rules were enforced, and how citizens responded to these forms of authority and domination. ‘Governance’ here entails a more encompassing phenomenon than the narrower concept of ‘government.’ ‘Government’ has a formal meaning, delineates a recognized authority and state organization, is oftentimes embedded in a constitution, and is recognized by the international public law. ‘Governance’ points to the ways and means of regulating life within a specific territory—formally and informally—including through means of coercion.¹³

Similarly, the rules of governance designed and implemented by ISIS should be considered as independent of the state practices executed by the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in North and Eastern Syria, as well as the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in North and Western Iraq. If we define governance as ‘the whole set of practices and norms that govern daily life in a specific territory,’¹⁴ it becomes clear that for the citizens of the ‘Sunni triangle’ daily life was not justly governed. Rules of governance in Iraq were capricious, malicious, and randomly applied; security was severely lacking; violence against civilians was common practice, and torture applied randomly or discriminately against alleged oppositional networks and families.¹⁵

Likewise, in Syria after the Arab Spring in 2011, the Assad regime’s repressive reactions to civil unrest and the ensuing turmoil left living conditions abhorrent for many. The state of civil war led to a cessation in the provision of many services and maintenance of order. Mundane state practices like maintaining public order, safe and clean streets, minimum standards of welfare, and various social and utility services were equally flawed or only very discriminately applied.¹⁶ For example, some residents still living in Mosul after the liberation of the city from ISIS stated that
they were living in better conditions under the rule of ISIS, including superior municipality services like water, power, and sanitation. In this state of affairs, the takeover of the northern and eastern parts of Syria by various rebel groups, their provision of two main pillars of civil life—food and health care—and their announcement of new regimes of law and order seemed to offer something less detrimental to many Syrian citizens. While there is substantial variation in how these different groups ran their swathes of conquered territory, this paper will only focus on the rebel governance and judiciary practices as implemented by ISIS.

The academic literature on rebel governance has predominantly focused on social and utility services, narratives, and symbols. And yet, running a police force is key to maintaining that first pillar of statehood: law and order, or the monopoly on violence. The literature on ISIS has fared slightly better by highlighting the infamous religious compliance police (hisba), the intelligence apparatus housed in the public security department (emni), and the organization’s international operational facilities—branches of the caliphate that gained international notoriety. Less attention has been given to a far more mundane instrument that could perhaps be considered even more important to consolidating and securing ISIS’s rule in the caliphate: the Islamic State Police (shurta), an ostensibly ‘ordinary’ police force. This paper seeks to partially fill the gap in both the ‘rebel governance’ literature and the broader literature on ISIS as to the role of this ‘ordinary’ police force as a separate and highly pivotal instrument in consolidating rebel rule.

The Islamic State Police as an instrument of governance

ISIS gained international notoriety with its brutal executions and punishments, which the group justified by pointing to its interpretation of the Sharia. In fact, ISIS’s whole system of rebel rule hinged upon this interpretation, from its bureaucratic organization to the structure of its administration to the practices of legal enforcement. Compared to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s governance, these rules were ideologically more stringent, administratively more coherent, and, in its implementation, far more rigorous. At the same time, ISIS’s strict rules did convey to the citizens some sense of predictability and principle, both of which were seriously lacking under the Assad regime.
There were four administrative bodies that counted as key stakeholders in upholding law and order and security within ISIS’ territory, supporting ISIS’ model of rebel rule: 1) the Department of Judiciary and Grievances, a law and decision-making body, 2) the Department of Public Security (emni), a high profile and internationally infamous organization, 3) the Department for Religious compliance, the hisba, and 4) the more mundane and ‘ordinary’ shurta, with this fourth organization being the main focus of this paper:

1. Within its Department of Judiciary and Grievances’ (Diwan al-Qada wa al-Madhalim), ISIS created a platform where citizens could file complaints against other citizens, ISIS public officials, and fighters who did not adhere to the strict Sharia rules. This department was the highest body of authority in the hierarchy of the caliphate below the Delegated Committee/General Governing Committee, oversaw the Islamic State’s court system, and, through this centralized position, was able to reach into all niches and areas of Syrian life.19

2. While the Department of Judiciary and Grievances was central to law and decision making, the Department of Public Security (emni) was responsible for collecting intelligence, interacting with spies and agents, monitoring operations, and planning attacks abroad.

3. The Department for Religious Compliance (hisba) executed and enforced these laws, decisions, and rules within and throughout the caliphate. In territories controlled by ISIS, members of the hisba were organized in field squads, hosted a main office in each department, and also employed special female squads. The hisba cooperated with the Islamic State’s military security department in manning checkpoints and border crossings along with the Hijra Commission/Committee to ensure both the flow of foreign fighters and the movement of goods and supplies across the border. If arrested, individuals would be brought to court or were transported to prisons. The emni, on the contrary, served as ISIS’s de facto intelligence organization, and was responsible for collecting intelligence on military affairs, ISIS’ citizens, and for gathering intelligence for running new attacks and operations abroad. It was also tasked to deploy spies and recruiters abroad, and to carry out various ‘dirty jobs’
regarding trafficking, organized crime, the security and continuation of the slave and oil trade, assassinations, etc.\textsuperscript{20}

4. Compared to the high-profile nature of the agencies mentioned above, the workings of the ordinary, day-to-day security and police patrols can easily remain overlooked by the research community or even considered as not central to the caliphate’s legitimacy and de facto sovereignty. On the contrary, the police work done by the Islamic State Police, the \textit{shurtat}, was an essential component of the caliphate’s appeal to people living under the rule of ISIS.

So, how did the Islamic State Police fit within ISIS’s design for rebel rule? In order to answer this question, the authors provide an overview of the organization and its activities, based on new information gleaned from the authors’ interviews and publicly available documents from the GW ISIS Files Digital Repository. The following aspects of the Islamic State Police will be discussed: The Underlying Rationale, Foundations, Concept, Structure, Rank and Duties, Composition and Demographics, General Information, Police Stations, Complaints, Checkpoints, Patrols, Security, Jailhouses and Prisons, and Other Tasks.

\textbf{Al-Shurta al-Islamiya (Shurtat ul Islamiyya): The Islamic State Police, ISIS’s Law-Enforcement Apparatus}

This section will flesh out how the Islamic State Police rolled out its law enforcement apparatus. We will highlight the rationale behind its work, its legal and theological foundations, its mission statement, structure, ranks and duties, composition and demographics, and some remaining general information. The most important part is the analysis of the Islamic State Police’s understanding of its responsibilities, including brief descriptions of how it ran police stations, checkpoints, patrols, building protection, jailhouses, traffic police, and remaining tasks. The handling of civil complaints and a more thorough discussion of these complaints will also be presented.
Underlying Rationale

As ISIS consolidated territorial rule, it became necessary for the group to establish a separate law enforcement agency, “the Islamic State Police.” ISIS leadership had three reasons for its decision to establish this force, that henceforth will be referred to as the “Islamic State Police.” The first was reputational: ISIS needed to inspire its supporters and present itself as a state with a substantial police force. The second reason was political and functional: the Islamic State had an obligation to protect its people and provide security. This functionality derived from the legal contract concluded between the people and the Islamic State, as laid out in the “Document of the City, wathīqat al-madīnah.” The third reason had to do with the question of accountability and legitimacy. Before the caliphate was established in June 2014, ISIS felt the need to expand its organizational structure with an ‘ordinary’ police force. The existing intelligence apparatus (the emnī) and the religious compliance police (the hisba) did not cover the necessary and regular law enforcement demands in the region. Moreover, in as much as arbitrary excessive force, killings, torture, and other brutal implementations of law and order became synonymous with ISIS’s rule from the outset, the group’s leadership felt that it had to provide some sense of the regular rule of law to its inhabitants and potential supporters. The Islamic State Police had to provide this functionality.

Indeed, the new police force was welcomed by many locals in Syria and Iraq since it brought some dimension of order and security to the war-ridden region. The implementation of a predictable and seemingly uncorrupt law enforcement agency after decades of deep corruption and abuse by government officials was frequently cited with reverence by interviewees. One of the defectors interviewed for this study described the situation as follows: “From that moment onwards, at least our lives were not under the constant threat of the regime (Syrian) anymore. Its soldiers would not torture or kill us, rape our women and loot our belongings.” Such utterances serve to explain how local people justified acquiescing to ISIS rule in their towns. According to the locals, previous government officials had been “the best thieves in the world.”
The leaders of the Islamic State were aware of these local misgivings about the regime and seized the opportunity to further their claims to legitimate rule. In fact, the head of a local Islamic State Police station avowed: “If we succeeded in delivering justice, we knew we would win the hearts of the people.” An engineer who worked under ISIS gave a succinct description of the situation: “The Islamic State was a terrorist State, but it was also a modern state.” From this perspective, in learning from past experiences and mistakes made by the Assad and Hussein regimes in ignoring the populace’s needs, ISIS would rapidly restore and establish the essential services in the areas once they took control. The leadership made sure that water, power, food supplies, and security were provided. In some cities taken over by ISIS, the residents immediately started to receive free or subsidized food, enabled by the fact that ISIS took over the bakeries and food distribution networks as it entered the area.

There is also evidence that local ISIS courts initially tried to build goodwill amongst the population by cracking down on ordinary crime, apprehending and convicting ‘thieves, murderers, drug dealers, and rapists,’ and providing security on the streets. The emir (commander, head) of the police station in the village of Sahaji, located northwest of the city of Mosul, was captured by coalition forces and explained his strategy as follows: “[our] goal was to try to win over the population.” The harsh punishments the new rulers imposed for the set of crimes announced by the Islamic State did indeed serve to reinforce its idea of justice, as one resident living under ISIS rule contended. He remarked that: “the city’s crime rate was near zero under the Islamic State.” Another defector compounded this observation: “At least our lives, chastity, and belongings were safe as long as we obeyed the rules.”

Additionally, residents living under ISIS rule expressed comfort in the fact that ISIS would punish its own members, including commanders if they abused their powers or misbehaved. For example, the head of the police station in the village of Sahaji detailed how he investigated a complaint levied against an Islamic State soldier who failed to pay back $3.50 he owed to an open market chicken seller. According to a New York Times report citing a local, the amount owed would have been considered
too insignificant to pursue. But once the soldier was summoned to the station, he immediately paid what he owed to the shopkeeper, making sure to avoid prosecution.34

Foundations
The first official mention of the Islamic State Police in ISIS publications featured in the second issue of the “Islamic State Report,” dated June 2014, immediately before the declaration of the caliphate, in an article titled “On the beat.” Here, the article’s author examines “how the Islamic State Police safeguards ar-Raqqah and their importance in state-building,” thereby propagandizing how the Islamic State Police played a vital role in creating the impression of an efficient state.35 Soon after, in June 2014 the Wilayat al-Raqqa media office published an article in which officials from the newly-created Islamic State Police officials are interviewed and provide a colorful image of their daily activities.36

The Islamic State Police was already in place before the caliphate was officially announced in June 2014. ISIS had already issued orders in 35 provinces (wilayat) to set up a basic law enforcement organization. Upon seizing control of these cities—for example, in Raqqa, Mosul, Tikrit, and Sirte—ISIS announced the need for the police force. These orders are important because they delineate a social contract that was assumed to have been concluded between the inhabitants of that region and the Islamic State, one which lays out “the Sharia principles and Islamic regulations by which the shepherd and the flock are bound.”37

Through its police force, ISIS traded loyalty with protection.38 Loyalty to its rule reduced the risk of becoming a victim of the group’s atrocities and enhanced the possibility of reaping the benefits of compliance. This contractual or transactional approach fits neatly within ISIS’s ideology. It originated from the notion of the bay’ah (oath of allegiance) to the Caliph, referring to “reciprocal obligations between the caliph and the people, whom the Islamic State refers to as an-Nās (“the people”).”39

According to a June 2014 Islamic State document titled the “Document of the City” (see Appendix), the following rules were distributed to people—both digitally and on paper—detailing the rule of law as the basis for the
contract that was to be concluded between the people and ISIS. Here again, the benefits to its citizens are underlined, including the provision of justice, security, accountability, protection, and services, in return for complete loyalty and fidelity to the Caliph:

1. “the right to justice and due process of (Islamic) law,
2. the right to security of persons and property,
3. a duty to fulfill obligations required by Islam, including abstention from alcohol and drugs,
4. a duty of exclusive allegiance and loyalty to the Islamic State,
5. entitlement to public goods and services provided by the Islamic State.”

According to this foundational “Document of the City,” the main themes of the contract between the people and the state are justice and security (or protection). These tasks are placed directly under the responsibility of the judiciary, as outlined in Article 3 (“the people in the shadow of our rule are secure and safe”), Article 4 (“no one is permitted to reach out his hand to loot or steal”), and Article 5 (“trafficking and dealing alcohol or drugs, or smoking, or other taboos, are prohibited”).

Unlike the contemporary police departments that it came to replace, the Islamic State Police was part of the judiciary (Department of Justice and Grievances, Diwan al-Qada wa al-Madhalim), and its duties involved tasks that went beyond policing, such as mediation and conflict resolution. According to ISIS, its police employed, “legal specialists who reported to a senior jurist (known as a shari’i), who served as a direct link to judges in the courts.” Evidence from the authors’ police dataset supports the assertion that the legal specialists within the Islamic State Police seemed to try to resolve claims or complaints through mediation between the conflicting parties. Cases were only referred to the courts if the legal specialists could not settle the claims by themselves or if the alleged offenses were such a severe or capital nature that only a judge could mete out the punishment.
Allocated to the Islamic State Police were also special Sharia judges, who in turn were affiliated with the magistrates sitting on the Islamic Courts. According to a police official interviewed by Wilayat al-Raqqa media: “Our work is concerned with settling disputes between the disputing parties. The nature of the work is that the complainant comes and submits his complaint; we then issue a document to subpoena the party under scrutiny. Then, the two sides are brought together, and we try to conciliate and negotiate an outcome. If we succeed, we end the case, and if not, we refer it to the Islamic court. In these cases, the accused will be detained for interrogation and is then brought before the Islamic court.”

Still, Islamic State Police officials seemed to lack standard protocols or a unified set of rules for their day-to-day operations. They seem to have relied instead on the orders of their respective wali (provincial governor, pl. wulut), judges, or commanders. These rulers took a pragmatic and flexible approach to the problems at hand, but sometimes created inconsistencies across police forces in the Islamic State. Occasionally, police practices contradicted each other even within the same city. These discrepancies in Islamic State Police procedures went beyond their daily operations, with wulut sometimes displaying a “tendency to protect organizational strength and pursue near term goals rather than maintain ideological purity.”

Inconsistencies in the protocol, however, were not the only bug in the system. Compared to the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, the Islamic State Police was not considered to be corrupt, befitting the Islamic State’s attempt to try to portray its institutions in as just a light as possible. Still, a number of issues arose implicating members of the Islamic State Police in malversations and corrupt practices. Although ISIS did discipline and punish its own wrongdoers, both as a Sharia principle and to reconstitute its legitimacy to rule, there were several occasions where ISIS senior leadership either overlooked or never investigated wrongdoings by members of its police force and administration.

Nonetheless, ISIS leadership overall tried to adhere to its principles in practice. According to a defector interviewed for this report, when an Islamic State Police commander in Syria was caught in an inappropriate
setting with a woman to whom he was not married or related, he was immediately fired and arrested on the order of the local *wali*. A year after the incident, the defector saw the former Islamic State Police commander in Mosul working as a traffic police officer.⁴⁶

**The Islamic State Police’s mission statement**

From the early days of the Caliphate, ISIS placed a particular emphasis on its police force. According to Wilaya al-Raqqa media office, members of the Islamic State Police were considered by the leadership as “men who have taken upon themselves the safety and security of the people, swallowed and endured hardships and used to stay up late to establish security and safety throughout the state.”⁴⁷

ISIS claimed that members of the Islamic State Police in the province of Raqqa were amongst the finest officials, working very hard to ensure that people and their property were protected from evil and criminal acts.⁴⁸ According to the leadership, the Islamic State Police patrolled the roads and streets, established guard posts (checkpoints) and preserved the safety and security of the Muslim populace.

ISIS also stressed that its police would settle disputes and restore the rights of people. It would prevent any oppressor from treading on other people’s rights, and no Muslim would be subservient to another anymore: “The people are as equal as the teeth of a comb. There is no difference between the rich and the poor and the strong and the weak.”⁴⁹ This mission statement was also translated into the creation of a dense and complex administrative structure.

**Structure**

The Islamic State Police was established under the command of the Department of Judgement and Grievances, one of many departments (*dawawin*) controlled and administered by the Islamic State’s Delegated Committee, including the *hisba* and the *emni*. Thus, it was both supervised by the local *wulut⁵⁰* and by the judiciary,⁵¹ since the departmental representatives and offices assigned to each province were not directly supervised by the Delegated Committee, but by the *wali* and...
the “Greater Diwan”- the central coordinating office for each department. It was the greater judiciary office that came under Delegated Committee oversight, and not the provincial branches directly themselves. To draw a comparison with the situation of law enforcement in the United States, the hisba and emni were similar to federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies. In contrast, the Islamic State Police bore more resemblance to local municipal police agencies.

However, the Islamic State Police closely coordinated with the emni and hisba as recorded in one of the Wilayat al-Raqqa reports from June 2014: “As for the mechanism of work...we have cooperation and coordination with the security apparatus, and we have close cooperation between ourselves and the men of the Hisba, may God grant them success.”52

The central structure and hierarchy of the Islamic State consisted of two main branches: the Consultative Council (shura) and the Delegated Committee. The delegated committee under the Caliph supervised and controlled the wilayat (the provinces within local jurisdictions encompassing towns and villages), the dawawin (departments/bureaus), and the offices and committees. The dawawin were positioned under the supervision of the Delegated Committee and had offices in all wilayat. According to the “Structure of the Khalifah” video released by ISIS, one of the objectives of the dawawin was to “protect the people’s religion and security.” Although upholding the security of the people was a central task of the dawawin, the Islamic State Police did not constitute a full department in itself (as did the hisba and the emni); it merely fell under the Department of Judgment and Grievances (see Appendix for visualization of this structure).

It stands to reason, then, that the Islamic State Police had a clear hierarchical structure. There was a general commander (emir) of the police based in Raqqa who answered directly to the Department of Judgment and Grievances, and who oversaw the police in the Islamic State. Because the Islamic State Police had no representation as an individual diwan, local police in the Islamic State wilayat had a two-layered hierarchy: commanders answered to both the local wali and the local chief justice who presided over the court in the wilayat.
Additionally, the term ‘General Police,’ which features in the documents above, appears to have replaced the moniker “Islamic State Police” at a later stage.

The local Islamic State Police commander would coordinate with both the local administration and with the judiciary based on the tasks at hand. Essentially, the police received its orders directly from the local *wali* with respect to administrative duties, including checkpoints, road security, traffic control, and the coordination of police operations. Separately, judges would employ the Islamic State Police to deal with judicial issues, including warrants, searches, arrests, charges, and the implementation of punishments.

**Ranks and Duties**

The Commander of the General Police in Raqqa was the top police *emir* in charge of coordinating all police departments across ISIS’s *wilayat*. While the general police commander did not oversee daily operations, according to the authors’ interviews, the local *wilayat* police chiefs were in touch with him regularly to inform him of their dealings, essential operations, and general matters involving coordination. The general police commander, in turn, answered to the Department of Judgement and Grievances.

The local *wilaya* commanders were the top police commanders in a given province (wilaya). The local commander fell under the authority of the *wali*, at the same time coordinating with the chief justice in that *wilaya*. The local commander would also coordinate and report to the general police commander in Raqqa. According to documents published by al-Tamimi, local commanders were “officials, responsible before God, tasked with tracking and overseeing and supervising the divisions of the police in *wilayat* and conveying the orders from the *wali*.”

The *emir* of the Special Police was in charge of the patrols, jails, and carrying out orders received from the courts or judiciary. The special police were reportedly, “the officials, responsible before God, tasked with tracking, overseeing and supervising the divisions of the military police in
the *wilaya* and conveying the orders from the *emir* of the general police in the *wilaya*.”

The *emir* of the Police in the Sector was in charge of a limited geographical jurisdiction in a *wilaya*, covering more than one police station. According to ISIS documents, the police sector commander was “the official, responsible before God, tasked with tracking and overseeing all of the stations in the sector and conveying the orders from the *emir* of the sector and the *emir* of the police in the *wilaya* to all the stations in the sector.”

The *emir* of the Police in the Station was the commander of an Islamic State Police station. ISIS described the duties of the police station commander as “the official, responsible before God, tasked with arranging and organizing the station he is entrusted with by the *emir* of the police in the sector.”

The *emir* of Intelligence was the officer in charge of the criminal intelligence bureau within the Islamic State Police. This police intelligence office should not be confused with the *emnī*, which was the stand-alone state intelligence agency of the Islamic State. ISIS described the duties of the *emir* of intelligence as “the official, responsible before God, tasked with gathering the information in terms of security and criminal matters and referring them to the *emir* of the general police.”

The *emir* of the Security of the Routes was the officer in charge of protecting the routes, particularly leading towards the borders of the cities where ISIS maintained a military presence. The *emir* was tasked with protecting these borderlines, which were also called the frontlines (*ribat*). Primarily, the *emir* of the Security of the Routes was “the official, responsible before God, tasked with making clear the presence of the Islamic State and managing security in the areas that are behind the *ribat* [frontline manning] lines.”

**Composition and Demographics of the Islamic State Police**

An Islamic State textbook published in 2015, “The First Shari’a Class: al-Siyasa al-Shar ‘iyya,” described Islamic State Police members as follows: “[The police] are to be selected from among God-fearing men who show
no favoritism, such that he who has committed a *hadd*⁶⁰ crime will receive the full punishment without any mitigation.”⁶¹

In general, Islamic State Police members’ ages ranged from 17 to 40-years-old. There were no female officers or members. Education levels ranged from university graduates to officers without any degree but some basic reading and writing skills. However, the majority of the police were, at the very least, high school graduates.

Most Islamic State Police officers were sourced locally, including from among the Syrian and Iraqi citizens under ISIS rule. The majority of the commanders or *emirs* hailed from Tunisia, whereas their deputies were locals. According to the authors’ interviews, some of the Islamic State Police members died during operations conducted by coalition forces, some fled to Idlib, Iraq, or Turkey, and a limited number surrendered to coalition forces and are currently imprisoned in the camps.

### Some General Information about the Islamic State Police

According to the authors’ interviews, there were over 1,000 Islamic State Police officers in Raqqa, the de facto capital *wilaya* of the Islamic State. Each *wilaya* under ISIS rule had different total numbers of police officers depending on their populations and needs. For example, there were around 150 Islamic State Police officers in Tel Abyad, a significantly smaller city compared to Raqqa. Based on the authors’ interviews and available data, there were approximately 3,000 Islamic State Police officers at the height of the caliphate spread across Syria and Iraq. How did they operate, dress, function, what were their allowances and benefits? Some coordinates, as gleaned from the documents and interviews:

**Dress, gear & operations:**

- The Islamic State Police uniform involved traditional clothes, including loose trousers and long shirts, with a vest marked as “SHURTA” (POLICE) (see image 15 below).
- The Islamic State Police’s equipment varied by *wilayat* depending on the availability of gear. All Islamic State Police officers possessed radios for communicating with one another. In addition to radios (and
particularly when radio signals were out of range), officers would use their cell phones. Most ISIS members had Syrian, Iraqi, or Turkish prepaid cell phone SIM cards. If an officer did not have coverage or a working SIM card, they would use available Wi-Fi connections. The commanders and *emirs* of the police stations had satellite phones, which enabled them to communicate 24/7 regardless of their location or coverage. Satellite phones were deemed more secure than radios and cell phones. Islamic State Police members usually were assigned an AK-47 assault rifle. M16 assault rifles were the weapon of choice for the commanders and *emirs* if any were available.

- Police patrols always consisted of two vehicles; each vehicle was assigned five police members. Patrol teams with two vehicles and ten members were called platoons. For operational duties like ambushing cigarette smugglers or arresting violent criminals, generally, at least one platoon would be assigned.

Allowances and benefits:

- Islamic State Police officers can be considered to be well off and rich compared to the rest of the society living under ISIS. Their salaries ranged between $250 to $300, which was eventually reduced to $150 when ISIS started having financial difficulties by early and mid-2017 as the international military intervention successfully recovered ISIS-controlled land. In addition to their monthly wages, Islamic State Police officers also received supplemental food items, including bread, vegetables, fruits, milk, and other grocery items. Islamic State Police members also received a share from the booty plundered by ISIS.

- In addition to the benefits listed above, the Islamic State Police were provided free meals on duty. Customarily, commanders would send meals to checkpoints or other duty stations from restaurants in the city centers. Other officers who were on mobile assignments were also provided with tickets to purchase food during their shifts. Each Islamic State Police platoon had a financial officer in charge of dealing with expenditures and purchasing food. ISIS did not give money directly to officers to buy food during their shifts, but provided tickets for the food items they needed to purchase if meals were not directly provided for...
stationed officers. The tickets were exchanged with cash later after vendors redeemed them at local government financial offices.

- The Islamic State Police did not generally carry a reputation as a corrupt organization, and the authors found no known cases of bribery. One explanation is that Islamic State Police officers were well-paid and received a lot of benefits beyond their regular salaries. Another explanation is that the Islamic State Police were known to dread the harsh punishments meted out by emni operatives for any misconduct that reached their attention. And bribery was considered a very severe misconduct. According to the authors’ sources, Islamic State Police officers’ primary fear was receiving punishment from the emni.

Organization & management

- Police stations were usually located in the buildings of former police stations in Syrian and Iraqi cities. In some cases, the Islamic State Police set up stations in other government locations like local health clinics, schools, or any building deemed appropriate.

- The Islamic State Police always worked under the supervision of a commander or an emir; no duty or task, in theory, was executed without such supervision. Even if only two officers were carrying out a mission, one was assigned as the emir of the team.

- Islamic State Police checkpoints, be they temporary or permanent, usually were manned with four to five officers. The emir of the checkpoints assigned the location and personnel. Permanent checkpoints were typically located at the entry and exit points of the wilayat. In contrast, temporary checkpoints were established based on the needs or orders of the emir of the checkpoints.

- The disputes within the Islamic State Police were initially handled by the immediate ranking commanders. If the immediate ranking commander was unable to manage the situation (e.g., in situations where disagreements between emirs arose), the general police emir would intervene. If the issue was not settled, then the wali would mediate and resolve disputes. Regardless of the dispute, officers were instructed to implement their standing orders until any disputes were solved or referred to the wali.
Duties of the Islamic State Police

The police under ISIS acted as a local, municipal force, providing law enforcement services similar to modern police departments. This section reviews the specific duties assigned to the Islamic State Police based on available resources in the ISIS Files Project database, the authors’ interviews, and available literature.

Police Stations

Police stations provided the focal point of the Islamic State Police’s presence in local neighborhoods. Police stations were clearly marked as “Police Station” with the name of the city (province) and region (township, neighborhood) like the Shaddaddi police station in Baraka province: “The Islamic State - Al Baraka Province. The Islamic State Police in Ash Shaddadi.”

The emir of the police station was in charge of that station’s jurisdiction and of any police-related activity therein. Police stations also housed the judicial clerks and prosecutors who oversaw disputes, acted as mediators, and imposed fines. Police stations were always protected by an armed guard at the entry of the premises. Emirs of the stations were in charge of day-to-day activities, including receiving complaints, conducting investigations, and patrolling the jurisdictions. Islamic State Police station personnel included the emir, guards on duty (for both patrolling the jurisdiction and protecting the station), detention room guards, drivers, and attendants (mostly the cooks and servants working for the police station). Personnel assignments were recorded in work assignment forms provided to each police station in a pre-published form, as presented below.

The ISIS Files Project database included several complaints filed at different police stations, in many cases stamped by the seal of the given station, e.g., “Islamic State Seal (The Islamic State/ The Islamic State Police/ Wilayat Nineveh/ Abdallah Bin Abbas Police Station/ Prosecutors).” The banner of the complaint forms read as, “The Islamic State, Wilayat Nineveh/The Islamic State Police.”
According to the ISIS Files Project dataset, the Islamic State appears to have printed different forms to streamline the daily tasks of the police stations, including forms for arrest warrants, summons, waivers, applications for claims, registration forms for personal identification, and more. These preset forms indicate that the central police authorities attempted to standardize and regulate the workflow and registration of the police departments and had achieved quite a sophisticated level of modern administration and bureaucracy.

Police stations also oversaw patrol units. These units were dispatched for specific duties, including summoning citizens and carrying out investigations, searches, and arrests. For example, an Abdallah Bin Abbas Police Station report details how a patrol worked: “A patrol composed of our brothers working for the Islamic State Police (Abdallah Bin Abbas Police Station) was dispatched to bring the defendant who is a cigarette seller) back to the police station. The defendant ran away from the Brothers, and seven cigarette packs were found at his house.”

Another task the police stations handled was the execution of court (judge) orders and summons, including searches, imprisonment, execution of corporal punishments, and transferring inmates to and from prisons and courthouses.

**Complaints**

The Islamic State Police, through the use of police stations, served as the point of contact for local residents to file complaints regarding various issues. According to the ISIS Files Project database analyzed for this report, the types of complaints included theft, agriculture and farm-related disputes, certain domestic issues, family, children or interpersonal disputes, assault claims, business-related matters, debt claims, collection and settlement, land and livestock disputes, and religious-related complaints.

An ISIS complaints officer, belonging to the Islamic State Police in Raqqa, reported that the most frequently registered issues were, “quarrels and disputes over property and debts, threats, thefts, harassment, etc., and
many of the cases brought before us are resolved even before they are presented to the court. Praise be to God.”

A June 2014 document belonging to the Islamic State Police in Raqqa stated: “We work to record the complaint submitted to us by the complainant and document his affirmation and refer it to the police official in order for him to order on his part the subpoena of the person complained against with an official document, and some of the cases we refer to the Shari’i court. The office has a landline for whoso wants to contact and register the complaint...and our doors are open and unbolted for everyone who has a grievance and complaint.”

Residents were not only able to file complaints about other residents, but also about alleged wrongdoings by officers of the Islamic State. According to the GW ISIS Files Project database, complaints were first handled at police stations without directly being referred to the judiciary. Once filed, local low-level prosecutors tried to mediate the cases at police stations by having each party come to an agreement and sign the paperwork, hoping to close the cases rapidly. Another outcome of the complaints procedure could take the form of a financial settlement. In such cases, the parties signed an agreement involving a set amount of money to be paid at a given time. If neither mediation nor financial settlement were achieved at the police stations, the cases were then referred to the judiciary for further investigation by local prosecutors and the courts.

The GW ISIS Files Digital Repository contained 374 Islamic State Police cases. Among those, 100 cases were referred to the judiciary, 88 of them involved financial settlements, and 49 were mediated at the police stations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Islamic State Police’s response in handling the complaints</th>
<th>Number of cases (out of 374 investigated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referral to prosecutor</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial settlement</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to other instances (mostly agriculture)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalizing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct arrests</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checkpoints

There were two types of checkpoints that the Islamic State Police administered within their jurisdictions: temporary and permanent. Permanent checkpoints were usually situated at the gates of a *wilaya*. They were manned by at least five police officers who would stop and inspect arriving and departing traffic to ensure no unauthorized people were leaving or entering the area. They also searched incoming people and vehicles for incriminating materials, such as drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, etc. In addition, permanent checkpoints functioned as the gatekeepers for the caliphate. For any defector trying to escape Islamic State territory, these checkpoints were the biggest obstacles in their way. ISIS issued permits for its members so that they could travel and pass through checkpoints without issue. Permits registered the name and number of the ranking official in charge of the permit holder so that officers at the checkpoints could cross-check the permit’s authenticity.\(^\text{82}\)

Temporary checkpoints were set up at various locations to manage a range of security and criminal operations. These checkpoints were usually set up for a limited time—sometimes only for a couple of hours—with a specific purpose. Islamic State Police temporary checkpoints were also used as contact points for the police to check in on residents around the checkpoints, or those who were passing through the checkpoints. Most claimants used these checkpoints to contact the police and hand in their complaints.\(^\text{83}\)

Patrols

Patrols worked under the supervision of the *emir* of the special police in each *wilaya*. Their responsibilities included patrolling the city, to which they were assigned different shifts. The primary objective of the Islamic State Police patrols was to embed police presence within the public and interfere with ongoing crimes or prevent crimes. Once a patrol unit intervened, they would take the case to the local police station if further investigation or involvement was required.
Security (VIP and Building Protection)

The protections of the wulut, high-level judges and other persons of interest were provided by the Islamic State Police. Personal protection included road security, which meant that Islamic State Police officers would coordinate with other police units to arrange safe travel for the persons they were assigned to protect. Additionally, Islamic State Police officers protected important buildings, particularly courthouses and jails. Depending on the situation in a given wilaya, a group of five police members was usually assigned to protect the central courthouse and the chief judge.84

Jailhouses and Prisons

The Islamic State Police were also in charge of administering and protecting detention facilities, jailhouses, and prisons. In an interview with the Wilayat al-Raqqa media office, an Islamic State Police prison ward disclosed a number of standard procedures within the prison system, including how long the police were allowed to keep detainees in their custody, “and if the detainee remains more than the permitted period, I am commanded to compensate him for every day he remains imprisoned in it.”85 While the authors were unable to cross-check this optimistic take on the Islamic State penitentiary system, the prison ward’s views may hold some truth since the statements were recorded during the rule of the caliphate and intended for the police’s own support base.

Shurtat al-Murur (Traffic Police)

The Traffic Police were in charge of administering traffic flows, investigating and responding to traffic accidents, record-keeping, licensing, and issuing tickets. More information is unfortunately not available.

Other Islamic State Police Tasks

The Islamic State Police also carried out various tasks regarding the security of different Islamic State missions. Among those tasks, the authors found that the Islamic State Police were involved with the protection of tax collectors and the transport of funds and assets. In cases where the assistance of a security detail was required, local emirs would
call on the *emir* of the local police station, who in turn would deploy some police officers to accompany the tax collectors. During such tasks, Islamic State Police officers were to conduct themselves as security personnel. In other instances, police members were assigned to attend repenting ceremonies in mosques or other places. They also protected sheikhs and mosques during, before, and after various types of ceremonies. In short, they would do whatever the *emir* of the police or the *wali* would order them to do.

In the early days of the Islamic State, the police were also responsible for detaining Free Syrian Army members upon their surrender. They took FSA fighters’ identification cards, registered them, and transported them in large numbers to repenting ceremonies staged for these prisoners to join the Islamic State.

The Islamic State Police station also functioned as the local registration point for all men over the age of 14 who submitted themselves for the Islamic State’s mandatory conscription.

By the end of the Islamic State’s rule, Islamic State Police members were also charged with overseeing the digging of ditches or tunnels around the cities. They would supervise workers and paid them per accomplished meter- some 25,000 Suri per five meters, according to a defector interviewed for this report.

**Dynamics between the Islamic State Police, Islamic State rule, and Residents**

Based on interviews with defectors from the Islamic State, and in combination with the trove of documents collected and translated by the GW ISIS Files Project, we can draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the dynamics between local residents and Islamic State Police. These conclusions will obviously demand further investigation and substantiation. Nonetheless, it becomes clear how important the visibility of public order and the maintenance of law and order were for local residents.
Life under Islamic State rule came with some benefits, particularly on an issue reported by most interviewees—trash removal. Most citizens reported being able to steer away from hisba patrols, and many were often completely unaware of the emni. For them, interestingly enough, ISIS’s rule manifested itself mostly through local authorities keeping social peace and maintaining clean, safe streets. While Islamic State Police officials did not directly oversee trash collection, they did reinforce collection efforts by making sure workers would carry out the tasks they were assigned with complete dedication. According to one defector: “Under the regime, those workers would be assigned to clean the streets, but they were never seen, and the trash was barely collected; however, they kept getting paid.” Cities under IS control, by comparison, were reportedly kept clean and relatively neat. Piles of rubbish disappeared, and water and electricity functioned in more regular intervals—at least according to the defectors—in a more regular and effective way than under the Assad regime. This type of ordinary, day-to-day policing activity has remained relatively underreported in media coverage of ISIS, which is mostly dominated by dramatic accounts of atrocities and brutality. Yet, the creation and organization of the Islamic State Police was crucial to generating the public authority accrued by ISIS in the first years of its rule.

Interestingly, the Islamic State Police was not only created after the hisba, but also because of the hisba. The emni concentrated its efforts on high-profile operations, intelligence, international operations, and organized crime. These activities were central to the Islamic State’s financial upholstering as such, but were not immediately visible or relevant to the bulk of ordinary citizens. The hisba, on the contrary, caused fear and terror wherever it went, often running counter to the build-up of trust necessary for conducting daily police work. Yet when it comes to exerting a system of rebel rule, the direct interface the Islamic State Police established with the inhabitants of the areas controlled by ISIS was crucial. It generated the effect of control, presence, performance, and even a sense of legitimacy. “We had a predictable order, and the streets were clean,” said one interviewee summing up his grudging support for the caliphate.
Two of the guiding research questions for this paper asked what kind of practices the Islamic State Police used to enforce ISIS’ rule and how citizens responded to these practices. To answer these questions, the authors systematically assessed 374 documents and files retrieved from the area conquered by coalition troops in Syria and Iraq from 2017-2018. These files all refer to Islamic State Police practices in the Islamic State’s Wilayat Nineveh, the area that overlaps with the heart of the Sunni Triangle. The table below depicts the type of documents retrieved, categorized according to their administrative functionality - based on their place within the bureaucracy, the headings of the forms, and the content in the file):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of documents</th>
<th>Number of documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of documents:</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installment payments</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Written Commitments</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summons</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts of Funds</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waivers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court cases</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation Records</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation (agreements)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities of Islamic State Police</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Lease</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest Warrant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment sheet</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for Reconciliation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disbursement of Petty Cash</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Transferred for review</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document to arrest a fugitive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of Disputes Brought Before the Islamic State Police

The following section will detail the types of disputes brought before the Islamic State Police and found in the ISIS Files Project database.

Financial disputes

Interestingly, more than fifty percent of the available documents deal with the settlement of financial quarrels (e.g., residents file complaints about debts, over arrear rents, over scams with oil barrels, or the receipt of funds). In these cases, the police are often involved because the financial disputes fail to be settled peacefully and end up as family disputes, with
'swearing and insults' involved. One example is a claim submitted and recorded on 25 September 2016, in *wilayat* Nineveh by the Islamic State Police:

The claimant stated that she went to her in-laws’ house to pay off an amount of money she owed them (to her mother-in-law) and to reach a mutual understanding regarding a personal family matter concerning herself and her brother (because she was standing in for her brother). She added that when she arrived, they began shouting at her and she was cursed at and reviled by her sister-in-law. The Claimant then added that the Defendant, who was upstairs on the second floor in his room at the time of the incident, came down and also yelled and reviled me and at my mother. He then raised his hand in an attempt to hit me, but his hand merely touched my head and he did not hit her. The sum of money the Claimant owes is in the sum of (5,000 Dinars).90

What is interesting in this claim is not the financial settlement per se, but more so the ‘family dispute,’ in which the ‘verbal assault, swearing and cursing’ is listed as the punishable offense. Frequently, available claims did not indicate whether the case was referred to a higher or specialized authority or the courts. In these cases, based on the description and the absence of any referral, it may be concluded that the Islamic State Police settled the case with a minor punishment not worth mentioning here.91

*Theft, trespassing, encroachment on water, power lines, grazing of livestock*

Many other complaints dealt with all kinds of material offenses concerning theft (e.g., of a freezer),92 trespassing, letting one’s sheep graze on a neighbor’s land,93 or encroaching on someone’s water supplies or power lines. Here, mild punishments seemed to have been meted out. Take, for example, this case of a resident who illegally tapped another resident’s electricity:94

**Full Name:**
**Mother’s Name:**
**Date of Birth:** 1988
**Address:** Tal Kif/
**Closest Notable Place:**
I, the individual mentioned above, do solemnly swear to: not to harass the Muslim, whether by words, swearing or by cursing and not to take from or encroach on her electricity line.

If I fail to do so, then I shall be held accountable and subject to penalties in accordance with Sharia Law.

Fingerprint

Seal & Signature Islamic State Seal
(The Islamic State/ The Islamic State Police/ Wilayat Nineveh/ Abdallah Bin Abbas Police Station/ The Prosecutor)

Once again, it is worth noting that swearing and cursing are mentioned as the first offense and not the powerline encroachment. The defendant is made to swear not to do so again, a statement that is confirmed with the Islamic State Seal, but no other punishment is mentioned.

**Denunciation**

One of the most interesting findings is the fact that many recorded claims seem to have originated from spontaneous practices of denunciation. Denunciation as a term and as a phenomenon is well researched within the context of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin. It can be defined as ‘spontaneous communications from individual citizens to the state (or to another authority such as the church) containing accusations of wrongdoing by other citizens or officials and implicitly or explicitly calling for punishment.’ Denunciation sometimes can be done by citizens who disclaim any personal interest and invoke specific state, ideological, or religious values instead. Denouncing and informing are closely related in this instance. However, denouncing can also be related to reporting trespassers to the police, in which case it taps into the maintenance of law and order as well as social control, rather than into a mode of totalitarian surveillance or a ‘Spitzelstaat.’

A comparison with the amount and content of denunciation activities and ‘complaints’ made by citizens to Assad’s police force can shed light on the level of ideological ‘Durchsetzung’ (permeation) of ISIS’s standards and norms in society. But from these police files, it is remarkable that most documents retrieved from the regional offices do indeed deal with filed complaints and denunciations – many of them actually reporting on ideological trespasses. This gives some indication and cue for further
research as to the level of totalitarian and ideological permeation of local society – in contrast to the Assad regime, which in this region ruled by fear and random arrests alone, and most probably could rely less on ‘help’ (denunciation) by its subjects.

What makes the distinction of denouncing, informing, and reporting criminal offenses so difficult is that under the Sharia, a far broader array of activities can be considered immoral or illegal than in a situation where the legal code respects civil rights and privacy. Even so, the introduction of the phenomenon of denunciation has some merit since, in the academic debate on dictatorial regimes and totalitarian states, it is conceptualized as a means to ‘gauge’ public perception and even support for a specific regime, in this case the Islamic State.

Take, for example, these two complaints:

1. The Claimant stated that he was trying to act as a mediator to help resolve a conflict between the Defendant and his uncles. The Defendant’s mother in law told the Claimant that the Defendant was speaking ill of his wife and saying she wanted to run away to Turkey, even though he had never seen his wife before.

2. The Claimant states that as he was returning home from the frontier (Wilayat Kirkuk), he saw that the lights were on at his house. He knocked at the door, but nobody answered. The Claimant then jumped over the wall into the house and found the Defendant with (5-6) other young men smoking cigarettes, playing cards, and backgammon. When he entered upon them, they ran away and scattered. The Claimant also states that he had warned his brother many times that his behavior was forbidden, but he did not listen.

Both claimants obviously felt the need to report the listed behaviors to the police concerning matters that did not directly involve their personal possessions or any violence committed against them. Spreading rumors is indeed unpleasant and can be perceived as harmful enough to be reported by citizens in open democracies insofar as laws related to libelous remarks are concerned. However, it is debatable whether the type of rumor listed
in the above complaint would hold up in court as a punishable offense. As for the second case, other residents (including the claimant’s own relatives) playing backgammon and smoking cigarettes is of no direct threat to someone’s life or livelihood, but seems only deviant from an ideological or ethical angle. There are more cases similar to this one, cases in which citizens appeared to share enough ideological adherence to report transgressions, signaling some kind of ‘public authority’ or even a type of legitimacy emanating from the Islamic State’s police work.

Of course, denunciation may also serve as a tool for local residents to survive in repressive situations. In the following example, the female claimant seems to appropriate the Sharia to denounce her husband for using her children’s allowance to buy cigarettes in order to get even with him:

The Muslim stated that her husband beat her in front of people without reason. The Claimant’s husband left her more than three years ago and does not give her her rights. The Claimant’s husband gives his second wife more rights than he gives the Claimant. The Claimant’s husband also takes her children’s allowance and uses it to buy cigarettes.100

In other instances, denunciations seem to be the last resort for parents with pedagogical problems, unable to rein in their children. This, again, seems to indicate a certain level of trust and reliance on the Islamic State Police to act as a legitimate authority in upholding not only public order but also enforcing some kind of social control ‘behind the front door.’ The below claimant explicitly invites the police into his and his children’s private life, obviously with the expectation that the Islamic State Police will intervene to help in a moderate way (and not by taking away or executing children or meting out too harsh of punishments):

The claimant stated that the defendant, who is also the claimant’s son, behaves in a manner that is not suitable for a Muslim. The defendant is also disobedient to his parents, grooms his beard and eyebrows, and wears tight clothes. The defendant also spends long periods away from home, and when he does come back, he provokes and causes problems.101
Mediation, Reconciliation and Management of Social Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Islamic State Police’s response in handling the complaints</th>
<th>Number of cases (out of 374 investigated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referral to prosecutor</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial settlement</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to other instances (mostly agriculture)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalizing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct arrests</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, most available documents contain only a description of the claims made by the claimants, and sometimes a note on whether the defendant appeared when summoned or whether the claim was referred to other authorities. Rarely is the intervention, be it a punishment or another kind of response, spelled out. Still, we can divide the claims broadly according to their corresponding mode of response. In most instances (100 cases), the claims were referred to the prosecutor, which was also done when more severe felonies were involved (oftentimes theft of cattle). In 88 cases, claims were settled by the police by means of paying off debts and settling quarrels through the use of fines. In just under 50 cases, the Islamic State Police responded to claims by way of ‘mediation.’ Only in two instances did the Police directly mete out punishment. Only in 1 registered case did an immediate arrest occur. Adding together the two categories of ‘financial settlements’ and ‘mediation’, it seems that the majority of cases were settled through non-punitive, extrajudicial means. This may defy some existing expectations of the Islamic State as a system of rule by means of ultra-coercive punishments; here, it seems that most cases were solved in a mild and preventative kind of manner. Take, for example, the below settlement through mutual agreement, pledge, and reconciliation:

- The claimant was present
- The defendant was present
- Reconciliation was done regarding: The quarrel
The following was agreed upon: Regarding the quarrel because of the problem that exists between the two parties
If they fail to reconcile, both parties shall be held accountable and subject to penalties in accordance with Sharia Law.102

Settlements like this one provide some evidence that police officials indeed behaved more like ordinary constables trying to soothe quarrels, calm and reconcile the parties, and establish some kind of agreement to prevent future disputes. There is no record of any kind of bodily punishment, flogging or otherwise, and the two recorded cases in the ISIS Files Project database that do refer to ‘penalizing’ do not mention the type of punishment. This does not exclude the possibility that bodily punishment did, in fact, occur. But from the 374 claims in this tranche of documents, we can conclude that the Islamic State Police functioned more like a communal or social worker agency and certainly more as a constabulary than as a flying Sharia squad. Indeed, many claims are provided with the notification ‘resolved by reconciliation’;103

(Resolved by Reconciliation) [...] The Claimant stated that he was passing by the market when he saw a quarrel. The Claimant stated that he thought that his cousin was part of the quarrel but then found out that the argument did not concern his cousin. The Defendant started swearing at the Claimant, saying: ‘Oh sons of a dog, you have no shame’. Later the Defendant saw the Claimant near his house, and when the Claimant asked the Defendant why he wronged him, the Defendant wronged him again, hit him and ran away from in front of the house. The Defendant’s son warned him not to complain against him because he had relatives within the Islamic State.

It may be the case that the Islamic State Police, in these instances, functioned more as an echo of traditional, local, and customary laws. In Africa and in the Middle East, magistrates and judges in Islamic judicial systems (sometimes called qadis) were, and still are, used to perform functions that fall outside the scope of strict western legal codes. They engage in mediation and managing social relations in a manner that scholars would call ‘transitional justice.’ Within customary Islamic judicial systems, transitional justice plays an important role and is usually executed by people with knowledge of the Qu’ran. It could be argued that
the Islamic State Police channeled these kinds of customary judicial traditions and those police officials (who were mostly local men of high status and wealth) acted as local qadis, although more research is necessary. In any case, citizens had to agree, cooperate, and support the system in order for it to function. Whether they did so out of their own free will and customary traditions, or merely out of fear of their case escalating on to the judges and courts is a very legitimate question – and unfortunately, one we cannot answer in this paper. But what is particularly interesting here, from a broader historical context perspective, is the extent to which these traditional functions were informally implemented by the Islamic State during strategic phases, below the level of tamkin (territorial control or central empowerment). Looking to the future, it will be salient to consider whether or not the Islamic State attempts to continue these types of traditional, and amongst residents well known and accepted functions, as part of a guerrilla governance effort.

Concluding Remarks

The last question is the most complex and elusive one: Can we consider the Islamic State Police to be an instrument of operable, efficient rebel governance?

We have discussed how in theory the Islamic State Police would fit within an ISIS governance system. We introduced the sources used to substantiate this claim. We then laid out how the nuts and bolts of the Islamic State Police were rolled out. On the basis of Islamic State Police reports and complaints we delved one level deeper and reconstructed patterns of interaction with residents in the area. This now brings us to the final concluding remarks on the importance of public order, mediation and day-to-day conflict management for the legitimacy of the Caliphate ‘on the ground’, starting with our hypothesis that yes, indeed, we may consider the Islamic State Police to be an instrument of operable, efficient rebel governance. Why do we think so?

First of all, within the broader Islamic State organizational hierarchy, the Islamic State Police held a relatively invisible, low-profile, and non-performative role, as opposed to the more visible and dramatic activities and repertoires of coercion and torture that were carried out by other
units within the Islamic State’s organization (such as the prisons or the emnî). Yet this paper has argued that the Islamic State Police was crucial for creating, consolidating, and enforcing a system of ‘rebel rule’. This instrument, inasmuch as it was quite invisible to the world at large, was nevertheless equally crucial to inaugurating a system of coercion. By creating and consolidating the instrument of the Islamic State Police, the Islamic State provided de facto sovereignty with meaning in its residents’ daily lives and established a legitimate form of public authority— inasmuch as one can use the word ‘legitimate’ in a state of (semi-) totalitarian control.

Second, the amount of spontaneous denunciations pertaining to ideological and religious transgressions points to some level of appropriation within society for the Islamic State Police and ISIS’s rule. For example, the Islamic State Police was called upon to deal with sons running wild and playing backgammon or with daughters refusing to wear appropriate, loose clothing. It meted out punishment to nicotine addicts and public smokers. Only in very serious affairs were cases referred to the hisba police – where they were most likely subjected to higher levels of violence and repression. In all other instances, the Islamic State Police was vital in implementing a system of mundane control of ‘commanding right and prohibiting wrong’ in the area.

In the third place, it was able to do so through cooperation and denunciation by members of the populace. Residents felt induced, or even compelled to report all kinds of minor transgressions to the police, whether these transgressions directly affected their own lives, safety, and possessions or whether they concerned moral and ethical transgressions. This in itself signals an acceptance not just of the system of coercion, but also of the ideology and system of justice (commanding right and forbidding wrong) behind it as a legitimate system of rule. At the very least, this manner of rule was a system – a predictable set of norms, standards, and expected responses – that held advantages for local residents. To some, there were perhaps more advantages to this system than those of Al Maliki or Assad.
Finally, it could be argued that the Islamic State Police operated in a similar vein to the local *qadis* in customary Islamic judicial systems (as practiced elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East) who manage social relations, engage in transitional justice, and strive towards settling disputes and quarrels by means of financial settlements and reconciliation rather than handing out harsh punishments. In the large majority of the cases investigated here, the mode of response and handling of the complaints is known; complaints were settled in situ, through means of financial settlements, or through witnessed acts of reconciliation (with pledges and agreements made). This indicates a large level of compliance, induced, of course, by the fear of being referred to more serious judges and courts, with far more violent consequences.

At the same time, questions and gaps of knowledge remain. The ideology under which the Islamic State Police operated was not very flexible, nor open enough to deal with the manifold vagaries of modern times and mundane conflicts amongst citizens. So, we cannot say, whether this system of rule, as supported by the Islamic State Police, was sustainable for a longer period of time, in a situation where consolidation would have set in and public expectations and demands for a functioning order would have increased. ISIS applied interpretations of the Sharia in the strictest, Salafist way. From the complaints made, it becomes clear that the Sharia was not well-designed to translate arcane principles in rules to deal with modern problems like conflicts over rent arrears. Nor did it provide concrete rulings on giving away one’s house while living with one’s daughter in order to take care of her. Still, the Sharia covered enough legal areas and offered the Islamic State some early successes in managing daily life and public order in the region.

Neither could we completely gauge, how the legal system of the Sharia interacted and was related to other systems of adjudication and mediation. The ISIS system of legal rule departed from existing systems of governance and law and order in the Middle East, especially in former Ottoman lands, where different legal codes, customary laws, and court systems coexisted, overlapped, and complemented one another. In the Ottoman Empire, the *Sharia* could exist side-by-side with local laws, customary laws, and mixed international courts. This system of hybrid
legality persisted into the 20th and even the 21st century. The Islamic State tried to sever ties with this tradition of legal hybridity and only accepted a totalitarian application of the Sharia throughout its system of governance. The Islamic State Police seemed to have enjoyed a small amount of leeway in continuing older practices of customary justice, but this ‘wiggle room’ was always constrained by the hierarchical and centralized surveillance and control apparatus implemented by ISIS leadership.

Although this paper laid out the structure of the Islamic State Police, its various activities and practices, as well as a selection of citizens’ responses to and interactions with these practices, it is clear that more research is needed. Another question that surfaced during the authors’ investigation concerned the extent to which the Islamic State Police was indeed a continuation of older, traditional customary judicial practices in the area. The fact that citizens went along with the activities of the Islamic State Police in settling claims peacefully through reconciliation and mediation displays a style of ‘rebel rule’ that oftentimes goes unnoticed amidst other high-profile publications on the Islamic State that report on the cruelties carried out by the hisba police, the Sharia Court, and the penitentiary system.

And a final question still stands as to whether some Sunni Muslims in the North and East of Iraq who went along with the Islamic State Police did so out of support and acceptance of the Islamic State’s system of rule. After all, the group was able to deliver a semblance of order and justice in some instances. At the same time, the practices of denunciation that appeared to be widespread also indicate deeper societal rifts amongst residents. The question as to what extent denunciation was ideologically and religiously driven, or rather an opportunistic means of settling scores and solving personal, material needs and disputes, remains an open one. This question should receive more research through fieldwork and studies of ISIS’s former residents. For the purposes of this paper, the authors may at least conclude that for any populace that experiences the absence of justice and an efficient rule of law, any form of policing is preferable to a state of war and anarchy. That the Islamic State Police was a modern, complex, administratively extended, and even efficient force can now be confirmed on the basis of the evidence presented in this paper. That it
functioned as an instrument of a brutal, extremist, repressive system of rebel rule, and that with its system of rule it exacerbated rifts and (sectarian) wedges in society is equally valid.
Appendix

*Image 1:* “The Islamic State- Al Baraka Province. The Islamic State Police in Ash Shaddadi.”

*Image 2:* Dawlatul Islamiyah Waliyat Nineveh Al-Shurta al-Islamiya

[Image of a damaged building with Arabic text]

[Image of a sign with Arabic text]
**Document of the City (Wathiqat al-Madinah)**

| Art. 1 | “We [the Islamic State] bear responsibility for restoring the glories of the caliphate and obtaining retribution for the oppression and injustice suffered by… our Muslim brothers.” |
| Art. 2 | “We do not make accusations without evidence and proof. … We show mercy to a Muslim, unless he has apostasized or given aid to criminals.” |
| Art. 3 | “The people in the shadow of our rule are secure and safe. … Islamic governance guarantees to the ri’aya their rights. The wronged will be given justice against a violator of his right.” |
| Art. 4 | “We order that the funds that were under the control of the apostate government (public funds) must be returned to the public treasury under the authority of the caliph of the Muslims, who bears responsibility for spending these funds in the maslaha [interest] of the Muslims. No one is permitted to reach out his hand to loot or steal … or else be brought before the shari’a judiciary. … Whoever steals private property in the form of money, furniture, and [other] goods from a private place without doubt will have his hand cut off, and anyone who collaborates with armed gangs who engage in brigandage will be subject to … deterrent punishments.” |
| Art. 5 | “Trafficking and dealing alcohol or drugs, or smoking, or other taboos, are prohibited.” |
| Art. 6 | “Mosques are the houses of God. … We urge all Muslims to build them and pray.” |
| Art. 7 | “Beware of employment with the apostate government and the tawīghū. … He who repents of sin is not guilty of sin. To the apostates of the army and police and the rest of the unbelieving apparatus, we say that the door of repentance is open to anyone who wants it, and we have designated specific places to receive those wishing to repent subject to conditions. … For those who insist on remaining apostate, there is no alternative but death.” |
| Art. 8 | “Councils and associations and banners [bearing the names of other groups] are unacceptable.” |
| Art. 9 | “God commands that you join the society [the Islamic State] and renounce factions and strife. … Division is one of the traps of the devil.” |
| Art. 10 | “Our opinion regarding … polytheistic and pagan shrines is that of the Prophet [who prohibited them].” |
| Art. 11 | “To the virtuous and dignified women. … Dress decently and in loose tunics and robes. … Do not leave the house except out of necessity.” |
| Art. 12 | “[God commands that we] establish Islamic governance and … release the people from the shackles of rotten positive laws.” |
| Art. 13 | “We listen to the council of the small and the great and the free and the slave, and there is no difference among us between red and black, and we judge ourselves before others.” |
Image 4: The Structure of the Khilafah

Image 5: The Structure of the Khilafah: the Committees and Offices, the *wilayat* and the *dawawin*
Image 6: The Delegated Committee: the dawawin

Image 7: Islamic State Police Organizational Structure. This chart is compiled by the authors on the basis of interviews with ISIS defectors and of documents published by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi.109
Image 8: Islamic State. Wilayat Halab (Aleppo province) General Police Department

This website is currently undergoing scheduled maintenance.
Images 9-10: Raqqa Police Department; June, 2014.111

Images 11-12: Islamic State Police seals

Image 15: Raqqa Islamic State Police complaint office

Image 16: Raqqa Police complaint division; reads as “Complaints and Reports Office Affiliated with the Islamic State Police.”
Images 17-20: ISIS Checkpoint in Raqqa, June, 2014.\textsuperscript{114}

Images 21-22: The Islamic State Police patrolling Raqqa streets.\textsuperscript{115}
In this paper, the authors will refer to the organization interchangeably as the Islamic State and as ISIS.

See for example The Sun, 23 November 2020. For an overview of the ‘monster discourse’ in relation to jihadist terrorism and ISIS, see: Marco Pinfari, Terrorists as Monsters. The Unmanageable Other from the French Revolution to the Islamic State (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

The Sunni Triangle is a region in Iraq to the north and west of Baghdad inhabited mostly by Sunni Muslim Arabs. The triangular angles are sometimes said to lie near Baghdad (the southeast point), Ramadi (the southwest point) and Tikrit (the north point). Each side is approximately 125 kilometers (80 miles) long. The area also contains the cities of Samarra and Fallujah.


To access the files, visit: https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/.

Anonymous interviews conducted by the authors in March 2020 with Interviewee 1 & Interviewee 2.

The interviews cannot be disclosed in their full content, due to privacy considerations and the vulnerabilities of the defectors involved. The interviews were conducted via telephone, in multiple calls, between March 2020 and January 2021. The first conversations with interviewee 1 and 2 happened in March 2020.


19 Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Judge, jury and executioner*, 3.


21 Revkin, “The legal foundations of the Islamic State.”


23 Author interview with an ISIS defector.

24 Interview with interviewee 1, carried out by authors via telephone, in March 2020.


27 Byman, *Road Warriors*, 191.


31 Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (2015): 95-117.

32 Byman, *Road Warriors*, 191.

33 Speckhard and Yayla, *ISIS Defectors*.

34 Callimachi, “The Case of the Purloined Poultry.”


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Interview with interviewee 2, carried out by authors via telephone, in March 2020.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, Judge, jury and executioner.

“A punishment fixed in the Quran and hadith for crimes considered to be against the rights of God,” http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e757.


Author interviews with ISIS defectors in June 2020 who worked closely with the Islamic State Police.


The ISIS Files 01_000015.

The ISIS Files 01_000010.

The ISIS Files 02_000240.

The ISIS Files 01_000010.


The ISIS Files 01_000007.

The ISIS Files 01_000155.

The ISIS Files 01_000186.

The ISIS Files 01_000067.

The ISIS Files 01_000012.

The ISIS Files 01_000008.

The ISIS Files 02_000255.

The ISIS Files 01_000182.

The ISIS Files 01_000014.

The ISIS Files 01_000011.


Ibid.
The ISIS Files 02_000279.


The ISIS Files 01-000075.

Author interviews with ISIS defectors in June 2020 who worked closely with the Islamic State Police.


Speckhard and Yayla, *ISIS Defectors*.


Author interviews with ISIS defectors in June 2020 who worked closely with the Islamic State Police.

Author interviews with ISIS defectors in June 2020 who worked closely with the Islamic State Police.

The ISIS Files 01_000051.

Referral pages may of course have been lost. But from most of our complaint reports it was clear from the document ending that it was a complete set.

The ISIS Files 01_000060.

The ISIS Files 01_000058.

The ISIS Files 01_000052_02.

Obviously, the situation in Nazi-Germany or the Soviet Union was different, with a secret police in place for a longer (Third Reich) or much longer period (Soviet Union). Yet, the phenomenon of denunciation in (more or less controlled) totalitarian regimes is a feature that could help us understand compliance with ISIS rule in Iraq and Syria. Here, as well, secret police was everywhere, as was the ideological claim made on the population. ISIS’s ideological tenets may have more in common with nazi or communist ideology than with Assad’s authoritarian rule of divide et impera.


In historical research, we cannot rely on polling data from Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, they are lacking or unreliable. Hence, in research on the Gestapo and Stasi files, denunciation is used as a means to qualitatively and exploratory assess public responses and attitudes to a system of totalitarian rule.

The ISIS Files 01_000056.

The ISIS Files 01_000057

The ISIS Files 01_000074.

The ISIS Files 01_000162.
102 The ISIS Files 01_000194.

103 The ISIS Files 02_000256.


105 Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, Judge, jury and executioner.

106 Personal collection of Ahmet S Yayla.


108 Personal collection of Ahmet S Yayla, ISIS Structure of Khalifah video.

109 Jawad Al-Tamimi, “The Archivist.”

110 Ibid.


112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.