SECTARIAN DISCRIMINATION IN POST-2003 IRAQ: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON IRAQI ARAB SUNNIS AND IRAQI ARAB SHIITES

By

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ABSTRACT

SECTARIAN DISCRIMINATION IN POST-2003 IRAQ: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON IRAQI ARAB SUNNIS AND IRAQI ARAB SHIITES

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This study aims to investigate the extent to which sectarianism impacts Iraqi Arab Sunnis' and Iraqi Arab Shiites' attitudes and behaviors. I use an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, which consists of conducting a quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative one.

In the first phase of the study, I conducted secondary data analysis of the Arab Barometer data set (Wave II collected in 2012) to examine the association between sectarian discrimination and following political news, religion, and sect identity. I looked at factors such as following local political news generally, following local political news from sect-affiliated media, individuals' degree of religiosity, and the sect with which a person self-identifies. I use binary logistic regression and ordered logistic regression to test four hypotheses. I expected a positive association between the dependent variable and following political news generally, following local political news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources, and self-identifying with a sect. Further, I expected a statistically non-significant association between the dependent variable and religiosity. The findings reveal that the association between following local political news from sect-affiliated media sources and the three sectarian attitudes analyzed in this phase of the study (doubting patriotism of those of a different sect, intermarrying them, and being neighbors with them) was not statistically significant. The findings also reveal that religiosity may improve some sectarian attitudes.

In the second phase of the study, I analyzed 21 semi-structured face-to-face interviews I conducted with Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites in the Iraqi Kurdistan region in 2020. The purpose of doing a follow-up qualitative analysis was to explore how certain views have changed since 2012. The findings reveal that as of 2020, Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites sectarian attitudes have ameliorated as compared to 2012. In addition to the positive shift in attitudes, these interviews also reveal that as of 2020, Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites are less likely to self-identify with a sect. One way to explain these changes is the fact that the country is now much more stable in terms of civil wars, counterterrorism, and sectarian tensions as compared to 2012. More importantly, over the past decade, Iraqis have developed what I call *sectarian awareness* that has potentially moderated sectarian attitudes. Finally, I cross-examined peoples' responses to close-ended and open-ended questions asked during the interviews and I found contradictions. While the close-ended questions on sectarian attitudes revealed glimmers of hope, follow-up probing questions showed that the reality on the ground was much more complex. Both groups complained about the discrimination they faced daily, and some of the respondents indulged in sectarian stereotypes. This cross-examination contributes to the line of research that suggests the necessity of using mixed methods to better capture the subtleties of sectarian attitudes and behaviors.

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to constructivists' discussion on the ways in which sectarianism fluctuates depending on time and space. The findings of this study challenge scholars and practitioners in the field of transitional justice and peacebuilding to shift their attention to the micro-level processes through which people stereotype, discriminate, and prejudge based on sect.

For the peace in the world where all beings can live together without violence.
For my father, who I lost along this journey. For my mother, who is miles away cheering for me.
For Ara, who joined me in the middle of the journey. For my beloved husband, Jeger, for his continued support.

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population of this study and allowed me to conduct some of the interviews on their campus. In addition, I want to deeply thank every single respondent who agreed to be interviewed for this study. I appreciate their valuable time and the information they shared with me. Without them, this study would not have been completed. Also, I want to sincerely thank my family for their support and patience throughout the years.

Finally, a huge thank you goes to the creators of the Big Bang Theory TV show: the only show that cheered me up after long hours of work. Watching 12 seasons of Dr. Sheldon Cooper, Dr. Leonard Hofstadter, Howard Wolowitz, Dr. Raj Koothrappali, Penny, Dr. Amy Farrah Fowler, and Dr. Bernadette Rostenkowski was one of the few entrainment activities in which I engaged during graduate school.[1]

[1] I do not endorse any of the stereotypes expressed in this show.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AAH	Asa'ib Ahl al Haq
AB	Arab Barometer
AJA	Accountability and Justice Act
AOI	Arab Opinion Index
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CSMF	Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
IGC	Iraq Governing Council
IKR	Iraqi Kurdistan Region
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MRS	Modern Racism Scale
PAPI	Paper and Pencil Interviewing
PEDQ-CV	Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire Community Version
PEDQ	Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PORS	Perceived Online Racism Scale
PPS	Probability Proportional to Size
PRS	Perceived Racism Scale

PSU	Primary Sampling Unites
TPRS	Perceptions of Racism Scale
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WVS	World Values Survey

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The literature on sectarianism in the Middle East—mainly published in English and Arabic—theorizes that sectarianism becomes established institutionally. This literature narrowly focuses on political actors and their particular roles in manipulating and reshaping ethnic and sectarian identities in the region. The problem with this primarily macro-analysis is that it largely overlooks the attitudinal dimension of sectarianism, and only vaguely investigates sectarian attitudes and behaviors on a micro-level. By drawing on and combining theories and methods from different disciplines—sociology, social psychology, political science, anthropology, international relations, and history—this dissertation fills this gap and offers a micro-level analysis of sectarian discrimination practiced through commonplace social interactions. This study contributes to the line of research that argues that sectarianism is a bottom-up process as much as it is a top-down one.

To understand better sectarian views from a micro-level perspective in post-2003 Iraq, this study uses mixed methods to investigate the extent to which sectarianism impacts people's sectarian attitudes and behaviors. I use an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which consists of conducting a quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative analysis to answer the questions below.

The Main Over-Arching Research Question

To what extent do Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites in Iraq discriminate against one other?

Specific Research Questions

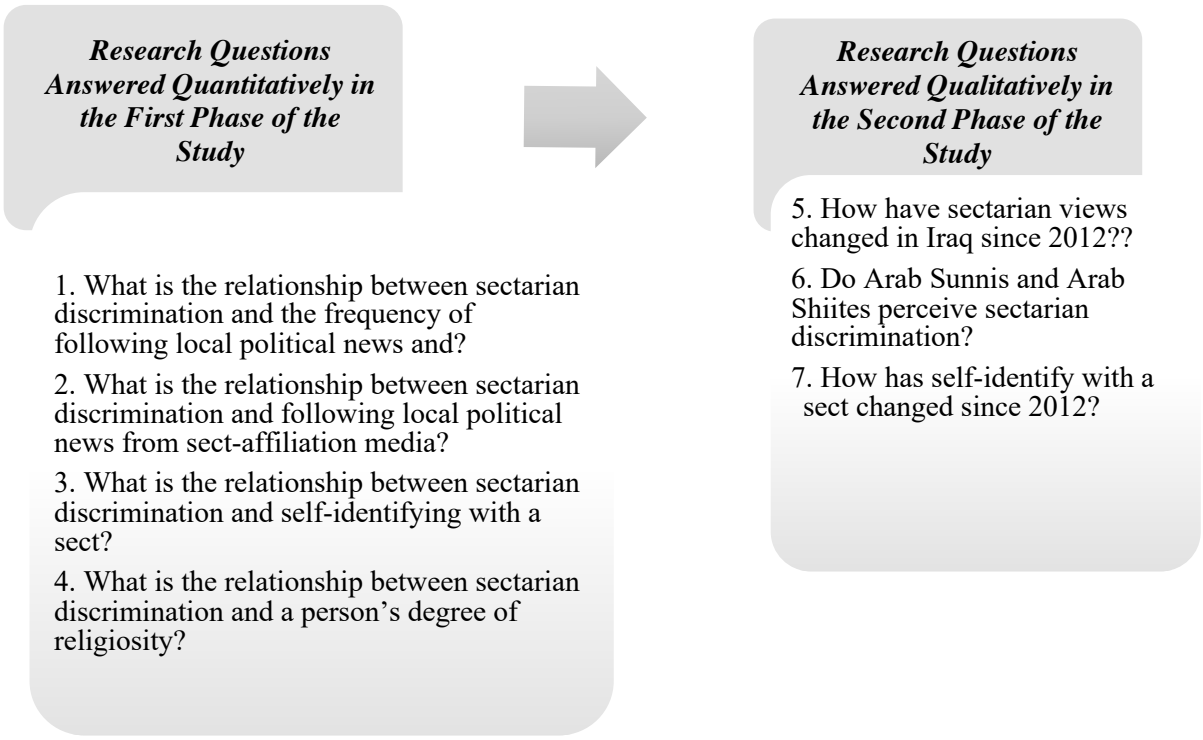

Figure 1.1 Research Questions

For over a century, Iraq has been caught up in interlocking patterns of ethno-sectarian conflicts, civil wars, and terrorism at genuinely frightful levels. Violence and conflicts particularly erupted after the American invasion of the country in 2003 (Saouli, 2019, p. 68). The civil war (2005-2007) between Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites is one of the major conflicts that caused approximately twenty-three thousand deaths and internally displaced over three million people (Dawisha, 2009; Kirmanc, 2013). Another major conflict that erupted in the country was the war against the terrorist group called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—also known by its Arabic acronym, *Da'ish*. The Iraqi Body Count[2] has recorded approximately one hundred and thirty thousand violent deaths with an additional displacement of another three

[2] The Iraqi Body Count records violent deaths caused by US-led coalition and Iraqi government forces and paramilitary or criminal attacks by *others*: Retrieved from https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/.

million between January 2014 and January 2019. The war lasted three years (2014-2017), and in 2017 the Iraqi government announced its victory over ISIS; however, the country is still struggling with intermittent attacks from dormant ISIS cells.

The commutative effect of these conflicts has arguably aggravated relations among various ethnic and religious groups and sects, especially between Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites. Particularly, after the end of the war against ISIS, Arab Sunnis are portrayed as "traitors" who allegedly helped the terrorist group. On the other hand, Shiite militias are accused of targeting Sunni civilians and being Iran sympathizers.

Even though Arab Shiites are demographically the largest sect in Iraq and Arab Sunnis are the second largest, the latter maintained their hegemony in governing the country from the day Iraq was established in 1921up until 2003. Throughout that period, Sunnis constructed the Iraqi nationalism inspired primarily by Arab nationalist lines. Scholars argue that that version of Arab nationalism was more inclusive and supportive of Sunni symbolism and identity and less so of Shiites' and other minorities' (Haddad, 2014a, p. 33). Throughout that period (1921-2003), Arab Shiites had to fight for fair recognition and representation in the government. In response, the Iraqi state took extra measures to repress their activism, promoting a narrative that viewed the Shiites as "reluctant Iraqis" (Dawisha, 2009; Kadhim, 2010). The cumulative effect of a nearly century-long state repression deepened the sense of communal victimhood and alienation amongst Iraqi Shiites. Eventually, when former President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was removed from power in 2003, Arab Sunnis' hegemony came to an end. In 2005, Iraqis voted on a new government, parliament, and constitution. Finally, and for the first time in the history of Iraq, the Shiite political parties secured a majority in the government including some key positions such as the position of prime minister.

With that said, post-2003 Iraq is a context in which both Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites feel at disadvantage. Shiite political parties established their hegemony in the government; however, the conflicts that erupted after 2003 coupled with systemic corruption have negatively affected them anyway. During conflicts, Shiites were targeted based on their sect. Furthermore, their cities and towns that were historically neglected by the state—for reasons I explain in chapter 2—remain as such to this day due to pervasive corruption and institutional weakness. The Sunnis, on the other hand, feel targeted and discriminated against under the overwhelmingly Shiite government. Like the Shiites, Sunnis were targeted based on their sect during conflicts. Sunnis' cities, specifically after the war against ISIS, were destroyed and the current government is not spending enough effort to rebuild them fast enough. Haddad (2014a) argues that some analysts view pre-2003 Iraq as a state in which Sunnis were supportive of the state and Shiites were its opponents. This narrative stems from the state's practice of conferred upon Sunnis the high prerogative of being oblivious to their [the Sunnis] power, blind to the realities of their sectarian privilege and the State-Shi'a centricity. Thus, Sunnis perceived themselves "more or less 'sect-less': they were 'normal' Iraqis and 'normal' Muslims with no need for hyphenation or sect coding" (Haddad, 2017a, p. 136). Now, in the post-2003 context, Sunnis have reversed roles with Shiites. They have become a repressed group in the hands of the Shiite-led government, and moreover, their sense of being "sect-less" has been disrupted. This new reality disadvantages the Sunnis because of their demographic weakness, lack of sectarian self-awareness, and poor organizational structure.

Research Design Summary

First Phase: Quantitative Analysis

In the first phase of the study, I use the Arab Barometer (AB), Wave II dataset—collected in 2012—and conduct a secondary data analysis to answer questions #1-4. The reason for using the AB is that there are a very limited number of publicly available data sets on sectarian attitudes in Iraq.[3] I found the second wave of the AB data set to be the most expansive one. Even the AB itself is not consistent with the same survey questions or the country they cover. For example, Iraq was covered in their second (2010-2012), third (2012-2014), and fifth (2018-2019) waves only due to security and funding issues. Additionally, not all questions are asked across each wave. For example, the third wave does not have any questions on discrimination or the sect identity of participants, whereas the fifth wave has only one question on discrimination and no questions on sect identity. The second wave is the only one that covers such topics more expansively.

Second Phase: Qualitative Analysis

After I conducted the quantitative analysis, I developed follow-up interview questions to ask respondents in qualitative interviews (questions #5-7). In the second phase, I conducted 21 original semi-structured face-to-face interviews with Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites who were living in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) in 2020. After the war against ISIS (2014-2017), many Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites from the middle and southern parts of Iraq moved to the IKR due to its relative safety. Originally, I planned to conduct interviews inside the city of Mosul where ISIS ruled for almost three years (2014-2017). However, given the limited funding as well as the political situation—the US-Iran crisis spawned by the killing of Qasim

[3] The AB and the World Values Survey are the two largest and publicly available data sets on the Middle East.

Soleimani—traveling to certain areas of Iraq was and still continues to be challenging. Travelling to and doing fieldwork in IKR was much safter, thus I visited Duhok city and conducted 18 interviews face-to-face and 3 interviews over the phone. I conducted all the interviews between January and February 2020 in the Iraqi dialect.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study challenge scholars and practitioners in the field of transitional justice and peacebuilding to shift their attention to the micro-level processes through which people stereotype, discriminate, and prejudge based on sect. This study argues that analyzing the complex matrix of ethno-sectarian dynamics cannot be restricted to just violence or active hatred. Sectarian discrimination can be—and sometimes is—manifested in subtle ways, potentially even unintentionally and unconsciously in the form of what might be broadly termed "microaggressions" (Davis, 2010; Fibiger, 2018b; Haddad, 2014a; Hafidh & Fibiger, 2019). Therefore, understanding these micro dynamics and the factors underpinning them can inform the peacebuilding process. Moreover, this dissertation also provides a novel discussion on the methodologies and methods used in the study of sectarianism in the Middle East, which encourages scholars to think about new ways of observing and measuring sectarianism in the Middle East.

Definition of Key Terms

***Sect*:** In this study, I use the word sect as the equivalent of the Arabic word *tai'fah*. Linguistically, *tai'fah* means a faction (*fi'ah*) or a group *(jama'ah*); however, in the contemporary Arab world, the word *tai'fah* is no longer used to refer to such but rather to religion or confession (Bishara, 2018a, pp. 55–56). I borrow from Azmi Bishara to argue that in the contemporary Arab world and specifically in multi-religious societies such as Iraq, the *tai'fah*

has become a socio-political identity. It refers to an imagined group that differentiates itself by means of affiliation with a creed or confession. This identity group highlights a set of affiliations that determine the individual's self-identification and the position others take toward him because of his membership in a specific *tai'fah* (Bishara, 2018b, pp. 79–81). More importantly, I argue that the word sect does not hold a negative connotation as far as it does not become the source of hatred, racism, prejudice, stereotype, or any other harmful attitude or behavior aimed at other groups.

Sectarianism [al-ta'ifiyyah]: a modern phenomenon exacerbated particularly after the American Invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab Spring in 2011. Sectarianism involves the politicization of religious differences by political elites to achieve mundane goals. Furthermore, sectarianism manifests in various forms that range from aggressive to covert at both personal and institutional levels (Bishara, 2018b; Haddad, 2014a; Mabon & Ardovini, 2018). I argue that the word sectarianism holds a negative connotation because it is often the source of contemporary political tensions between different ethnic and sect groups in the Middle East. Furthermore, I borrow from Azmi Bishara to argue that in nation-states like Iraq, sectarianism has constructed trans-national groups that are *imagined*. Each group shares similar religious rituals, holidays, and a shared past that consists of a sense of victimhood, martyrdom, and heroism and that cherishes sacred sites (religious or secular) where past battles occurred. In their relation to the state, each group thinks of its interest that grants group members a fair share in the state. Finally, sectarianism makes groups suspect the intentions that the *other* has toward them, based on past experiences or a shared memory that may not be based on actual historical facts (Bishara, 2018b, p. 81).

Sectarianization: I borrow the definition from Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, who posit that it is "a process shaped by political actors operating within specific contexts, pursuing political

goals that involve popular mobilization around particular (religious) identity markers" (Hashemi & Postel, 2017a, p. 18).

Sect Identity: In this study, I define sect identity as the extent to which one identifies with a particular religious sect. More importantly, this identity has a strong religious aspect that is *not* dwarfed by the socio-political functions of group identity.

Sectarian Identity: I define it as the extent to which one identifies with a particular religious sect; however, the religious aspect of it is perhaps dwarfed by socio-political functions of group identity (Haddad, 2014a, p. 25).

Sectarianism on the individual level: I define it as the ways in which sectarianism is absorbed into the rhythms and relations that make up the everyday life of people. Further, sectarianism can be manifested in the form of stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination.

Sectarian discrimination: I define it as the blatant antipathy towards other sects, believing in their inferiority and endorsing pejorative stereotypes of them. Further, sectarian discrimination can be manifested directly and blatantly, or indirectly and covertly.

To summarize, in this study, I differentiate between sect and sectarianism, sect identity, and sectarian identity. I emphasize that sectarianism and sectarian identity may have a religious aspect—however, one that is dwarfed by socio-political functions of group identity— whereas sect and sect identity retain a strong religious aspect.

Dissertation Outline

In chapter 2 of my dissertation, I present and analyze the contemporary history of Iraq from the inception of the state in 1921 to the present day. The main argument I make in this chapter is that Sunni and Shiite differences are not primordial. Instead, I argue, that domestic governance, political economy, geopolitics—the interplay among regional, domestic, and

international politics—non- and substate actors, and clerical elites have affected the transformation and diffusion of sectarianism in Iraq.

In chapter 3, I take an interdisciplinary approach to define sectarianism. I draw and combine theories and methods from different disciplines, including sociology, social psychology, political science, anthropology, international relations, and history, to define sectarianism. I extensively borrow from Fannar Haddad, Nader Hashemi, Toby Dodge, Toby Matthiesen, Simon Mabon, Morten Valbjørn, Adham Saouli, Eric Davis, Thomas Fibiger, Raymond Hinnebusch, Ussama Makdisi, Ali al-Wardi, Azmi Bishara, Haider Saeed, Joanne Randa Nucho, and others to assert that sectarianism is the politicization of ethnic and religious differences prompted by political rulers seeking to achieve mundane goals. Like the above-mentioned scholars, I contend that sectarianism manifests in various forms that range from aggressive to covert at both personal (micro) and institutional (macro) levels.

In chapter 4, I discuss the methodologies and methods used in the study of sectarianism in the contemporary Middle East. The main argument I make in this chapter is that despite the growing number of quantitative and mixed-method studies, qualitative approaches still dominate the field. Additionally, I discuss some challenges that qualitative and quantitative researchers face while collecting data on sectarianism in the Middle East, including (but not limited to) the scarcity of high-quality survey sample data sets collected with public funds, the limited number of institutions that focus and support quantitative methodologies, and the political unrest that sometimes prevents the researcher from accessing the population.

In chapter 5, I present the quantitative part of this mixed-method design: secondary data analysis of the Arab Barometer survey data, the second wave collected between February and March 2012. I use logistic and ordered logistic regressions to answer questions #1-4 (see Figure

1.1). The findings reveal that greater news media attention decreases the likelihood of doubting the patriotism of those who belong to another sect. Following more news may also increase the likelihood of having members of the other sect as neighbors; however, the association between the two variables is statistically not significant. The data also reveal some unexpected findings. For example, the association between following political news from sect-affiliated channels and all three discriminatory attitudes (doubting the patriotism of the other sect, intermarrying the other sect, and having the other sect as neighbors) was statistically not significant. Similarly, the results show that religiosity may improve some attitudes such as not doubting the patriotism of the other sect and being more willing to have them as neighbors.

In chapter 6, I present the qualitative part of this study, which consists of 21 original semi-structured interviews I conducted face-to-face with Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites between January and February 2020 in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. In this chapter I discuss why Kurdistan Region was important in terms of case selection and respondent recruitment. I also discuss the purpose of conducting these interviews which is to answer questions #5-7 (see Figure 1.1). The results of these interviews reveal glimmers of hope that after years of sectarian contestation in Iraq, Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites are much more tolerant toward each other than before. For example, both groups sympathized and recognized each other's pain. They insisted that the members of the public do not discriminate against each other, but that politicians have politicized sect identities, state institutions, and bureaucracies to turn people against each other. Participants supported their statements by recalling the ongoing anti-corruption protests in Iraq as compelling evidence of the unity of Iraqis and as a sign of a promised post-sectarian era. Nevertheless, follow-up probing questions revealed that the reality on the ground was much more complex. Both groups complained about facing hardship when

they crossed checkpoints, processing paperwork in state institutions, and sometimes when they applied for jobs or tried to join sports teams. Some participants witnessed how sectarianism infiltrated everyday Iraqis lives: neighbors and families that turned against each other, divorces, fights, and breakups. Additionally, a small number of participants did indulge in sectarian stereotypes. This chapter reveals that sectarian discrimination can be internalized by citizens and manifested in covert and overt ways. It also reveals subtle ways in which discrimination based on sect manifest.

Finally, in chapter 7, I discuss some key findings of both datasets. Then I address the limitations of this study and future research directions.

CHAPTER 2 : IRAQ: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

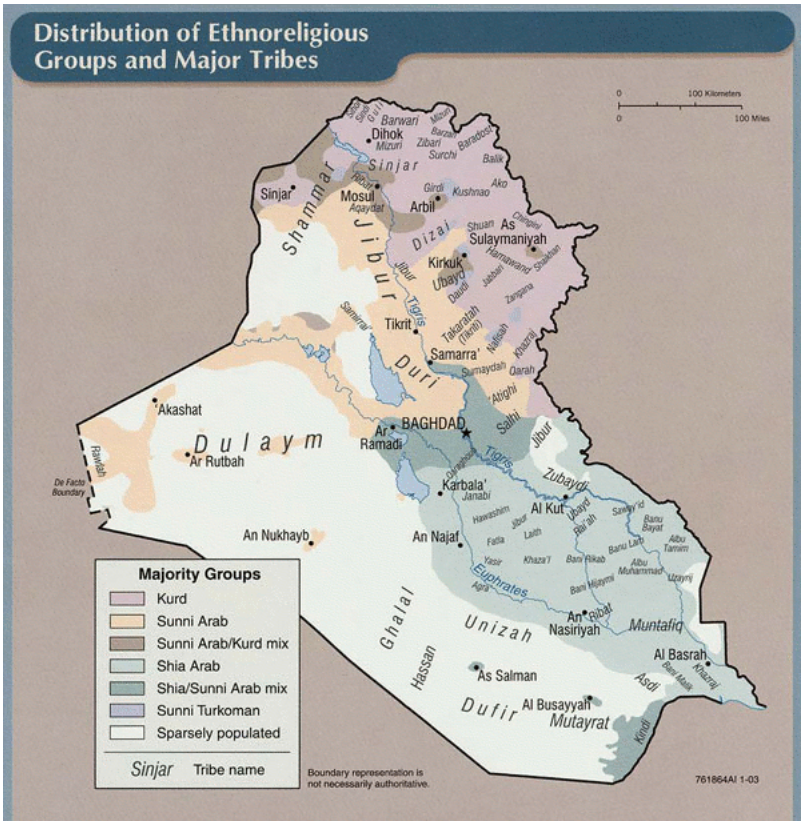

Figure 2.1 Iraq's Map. Source: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) 2007

This map shows the ethnic and religious composition of Iraq as of 2007. The areas in light pink in northeast are populated by Kurds. The Kurdish cities of Dohuk (Dihok), Erbil (Arbil), and Sulaymaniyah compose the territories governed by the Iraqi Kurdistan Government. It is also worth noting where Sunnis and Shia are populated, with areas in light orange predominated by the Sunnis and areas in light green populated by the Shia. In addition, there are mixed areas such as those in brown color where Arab Sunnis and Kurdish Sunnis live, as well as areas in dark green where Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites live. According to the CIA World Fact book website, as of 2020, the religious composition of Iraq is as follow: approximately 95-98% are Muslim of whom 64-69% are Shia and 29-34% are Sunni (CIA World Fact Book, 2021).

With that said, and in order to understand the importance of the research questions I investigate in this dissertation, it is imperative to present a historical background and analysis of Iraq. In this chapter, I examine the political development of Iraq from the inception of the state in 1921 to the present day. I follow a chronological order to discuss different social, political, and economic events and the ways in which they shaped ethnic and sectarian dynamics in each of the historical periods I delineate. The main argument I make in this chapter is that Sunni and Shiite differences are not primordial as some analysts insist. Instead, I argue that domestic governance, political economy, geopolitics, non- and sub-state actors, and clerical elites have affected the transformation and the diffusion of sectarian dynamics in Iraq, specifically in the post-2003 context (Wehrey, 2018).

I divide the chapter into two main periods: early 20th century up to 1958 and 1958-present. In the first half, I discuss the formation of the state of Iraq as a British colony and the ways in which colonial powers helped construct sectarian identities. In the second half of the chapter, I examine the rise of the Ba'ath regime and how the intersection of tribe, class, and regional background shaped sectarian dynamics, albeit in sublet ways. I then turn to extensively interrogate sectarian dynamics in the post-2003 Iraq context.

The First Half of the Twentieth Century

Colonial and Post-Colonial Era (1919-1958)

Social scientists argue that the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 was the starting point for the contemporary sectarian conflicts in the Middle East. To begin, the Ottoman Empire ruled over a vast multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic landscape for nearly half a millennium. After its breakdown, the European colonial powers remapped the Middle East region and created nation-states such as Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Consequently, the creation of

these nation-states altered people's perceptions of themselves and others. It introduced the public to new notions such as citizenship, political power, economic entitlement, and nationalism.[4] In this new post-Ottoman Empire context, sectarian identities were formulated and increasingly contested in regard to who had access to political power.

Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq was divided into three administrative divisions—also known as *vilayet*: Mosul *vilayet* in the north, Baghdad *vilayet* in the middle, and Basra *vilayet* in the south. When British troops occupied the Iraqi territories in 1918, they united these three *vilayet*s under a new administration. In 1919, at the Paris Peace Conference, the United States President Woodrow Wilson declared the mandate system, which aimed to transfer power to the indigenous people of the Middle East (Dawisha, 2009). The following year, the mandate system awarded the British the mandate of Mesopotamia—the Iraqi territories under the defeated Ottoman Empire. Despite the British authorities' promises to hand over control to the indigenous people as part of its age-old colonial policy of direct rule, Iraq remained under the direct rule of the colony until the late 1940s (Dawisha, 2009).

Since the early days of British occupation, anti-British sentiments were already growing. Shiite religious leaders in the south, Sunni nationalists in Baghdad, and Kurdish nationalists in the north led resistance movements against the British. Different political parties, movements, and associations were established. They had mixed intentions yet one aim: a state that is ultimately free of British rule (Marr, 2018). Among the many parties and associations, in al-

[4] Nuri (2015) presents a detailed argument on why he refutes the artificial state hypothesis. The artificial state hypothesis emphasizes the artificial nature of Iraq and other nation-states created by colonial powers. This hypothesis states that if these newly formed nation-states do not align with western nation-state models it will result in the failure of the state to bring together the diverse population and it will lead to a forced form of integration that is artificial. Nuri insists that the British and the West by extension have long promoted this narrative of Iraq to explain ethno-sectarian conflicts. For Nuri, the concept of "Iraq" as geographical entity and as an identity marker existed long before the British colony and he presents documentations of how the term "Iraq" was used by public and elite groups in the Ottoman Empire.

Kadhimiya, the Shiite-based political party al-Nahdha was established, opposing the mandate system. In Baghdad, the Haras-al-Istiqlal party led by both Shiite and Sunni politicians was established; it too denounced the mandate system. Additionally, in Baghdad the Sunni-based party al-Hur was established; notably, this party did not oppose the mandate system. Also, in Baghdad and Mosul, former Sunni military officers in the defeated Ottoman Empire established the al-Ahd association, its driving force being Arabism. They did not support the mandate system but believed that for Iraq to stand strong it needed help from superpowers like Britain. Finally, in Sulaymaniyah, the Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji had the ambition to establish a larger Kurdish state under the British mandate that would include all the Kurdish areas in Iraq and some in Turkey.

As early as 1920, the Haras-al-Istiqlal and al-Nahdha parties organized anti-British demonstrations to oppose the mandate system. The British authorities banned both parties and sent their leaders into exile. Furthermore, between April 1919 and June 1919, Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji was able to form a Kurdish government in northern Iraq, equipped with an army, a flag bearing its emblem, and stamps (Eskander, 2001; Kirmanj, 2013). To maintain the integrity of the Iraqi state, the British opposed Sheikh Mahmud's plans, and a military confrontation between the two parties ensued. In June 1919, the British captured Sheikh Mahmud and sent him to exile.

Anti-British sentiments further spread across the country, leading to the 1920 Iraqi Revolution, also known as the Great Iraqi Revolution. Between the end of June and mid-October 1920, the country descended into chaos. Despite the revolutionists' intermittent success, the British were able to counterattack and restore order by the end of October. Despite the communal diversity and the multiple visions of revolutionaries, the denominator that united these communities was the anti-colonial (i.e., anti-British) sentiment. Kirmanj (2013) argues that in

general, Sunni parties and organizations agreed that Iraq needed some sort of support from superpowers, whereas the religious and tribal leaders of Shiite parties rejected any direct rule of the British, instead demanding full independence. This contrast is evident by examining the memoirs written by tribal figures from the mid-Euphrates—predominantly populated by Shiites—and those written by the Baghdadi elite—a mix of Sunnis and Shiites. The latter espoused a more transnational sense of Arabism, whereas the former's sense of Arab identity was much more localized within Iraqi frames of reference (Haddad, 2012, p. 5).

The British authorities worked to set up a constitutional monarchy. Given the communal plurality of Iraq, the British recognized that no local candidate would receive universal support. Thus, they stuck with the idea of bringing in an outsider with no direct connections to any Iraqi community to rule the country (Dawisha, 2009, p. 14). In August 1921, the British appointed Prince Faisal bin Ali, the son of the Sharif of Mecca, the first king of Iraq. King Faisal, who came from an aristocratic Sunni Arab lineage, had an established reputation for fighting against the Turks and for the independence of Arab lands. The Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north did not initially approve of King Faisal, as they were not happy with the idea of a non-Iraqi Arab Sunni ruling the country. That is until later, when King Faisal reassured both communities that their local demands would be considered. Only then did he become more popular among Shiites and Kurds (Kirmanj, 2013).

In 1930, Iraq and Britain signed the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which two years later transitioned Iraq from the mandate system of the League of Nations to an independent state. The treaty granted Iraq independence; however, it retained British influence in the sense that the British maintained their military bases in Iraq and the right for the passage of their armed forces during times of conflicts. The treaty also granted British companies access to Iraqi oil resources.

In exchange for and in addition to independence, Iraq received military training and support. As a result, the state of Iraq was able to fortify its army and air force for the first time.

In 1933, King Faisal passed away and his son, Ghazi, assumed the throne. Young and inexperienced, as compared to his father, Ghazi faced unprecedented internal challenges. First, anti-British, and anti-foreign sentiments had been smoldering for some time. Second, the state of Iraq was transitioning from a society based on tribal organization and values to one based on bureaucracy that reinforced state institutions under the influence of the British (Marr, 2018, pp. 40–41). Third, the demographic structure of the south was tribal with an authority structure composed of tribal leaders—also known as *sheiks*—and senior clerics—also known as *Mujtahids*.[5] Tribal *sheiks* felt particularly threatened by the state power and its new policies. One of those policies was the reform of the Land Settlement Law of 1932 that was originally passed to fix rights of land ownership and encourage investment in agriculture. The reason the reform was challenged was because the Land Settlement Law had helped tribal *sheiks* secure legal titles and reduce the power of tribesmen to sharecropping tenants. Another law that tribal *sheiks* ferociously challenged was the conscription law passed in 1934. The law brought an increasing number of tribesmen into military service and consequently depleted strength from tribal *sheiks*. In addition, the state held a general election at the end of 1934, after which the tribal representation in parliament declined considerably. These underlying factors incited *sheiks* and tribesmen to revolt against the state.

Another challenge that Ghazi had to contend with was the incorporation of the Shiites into the government. First, when his father, Faisal, came to Iraq, a group of young, educated Sunni Arabs came with him. That group of lawyers, officers, and civil servants filled high-

[5] Kadhim and Alrebh (2021) define the mujtahids as " (scholars with the power of legal reasoning-*ijtihād*) constitute the religious elite with the right to issue religious rulings (fatwas)" (p. 1).

ranking state positions. Second, the Shiite clerics discouraged Shiites to enter public service. Their reasoning was that public service was dominated by secular Sunnis who were inspired by Arab nationalism and who worked under the leadership of the British occupation. The Shiite clerics argued that participation was unlawful and sinful. Finally, the Sunni ruling elites were reluctant to appoint Shiites among high ranks. Sunnis reasoned that the Shiites lacked qualifications and skills. For those reasons, and despite their demographic weight, the Shiites remained underrepresented in the government, while the Sunnis established their dominance. These factors further complicated the relationship between the Shiites and the central authority throughout the mandate period and beyond.

Ghazi died in 1939 and his underage son, Faisal II, took over. Because Faisal II was a minor, Ghazi's cousin, Abd al-Ilah, served as his regent. Abd al-Ilah aligned more with the British than with Iraqis and Arab nationalists. As a result, nationalist sentiment continued to mount. A group of Iraqi nationalists, mainly Sunnis, led by the nationalist Rashid Ali- al-Gaylani staged a coup, overthrew the government of Abd al-Ilah, and formed a new government composed of nationalists. These events led to the second occupation of Britain in 1941. British forces defeated al-Gaylani's government, restored the pre-coup one, and brought back the former regent, Abd al-Ilah. The second occupation ended in 1947; however, British military bases remained in Iraq until 1954.

To summarize the discussion presented above, scholars agree that in the first half of the twentieth century and after the British transferred power to Sunni elites in Iraq, political dynamics allowed the Sunnis to construct a new Iraqi nationalism inspired primarily by Arab nationalist lines. This version of Arab nationalism was arguably more inclusive and supportive of Sunni identity and less so of Shiites' and other minorities' (Haddad, 2014a, p. 33). In fact, under

the mandate system (1914-1932), Iraqi minorities and sub-groups had to dilute their identities to better assimilate to the new supposed nation-state. Any different identity was viewed as a potential indicator of "dual loyalties" and was, therefore, contrived as a threat to national unity. Thus, the *Arabness* and the *Iraqiness* of many Iraqi Arab Shiites was and still is put into question. As illustrated above, this narrative dates back to the early days of the establishment of Iraq and the idea that Iraqi Arab nationalists conspired to delegitimize Shi'a activism and opposition to the colonial powers and later to the Sunni overlords (Dawisha, 2009; Kadhim, 2010). Haddad (2014) argues that this narrative perpetuates the old myth of associating Shiites with Iran: a myth that dates back to the centuries of Ottoman-Persian rivalry.[6]

The Second Half of the Twentieth Century

Post-Colonial and Ba'ath Era (1958-2003)

Between 1958 and 1968, Iraq experienced several more coups. In 1958, Abd al-Karim Qasim, a socialist with anti-British and anti-monarch sentiments, led a military coup and ended the monarch mandate. King Faisal II and Abd al-Ilah were both killed during the coup. Qasim's regime introduced policies of egalitarianism, ended the land ownership by a few citizens, reduced the power of the urban wealthy over the political system, and gave greater political power to the middle class. His cabinet was fairly representative of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian communities, compromising Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds, and liberals, Marxists, and Arab nationalists. With that being said, Qasim's government lacked a strong political structure for governance and was unable to mobilize wide enough constituencies.

[6] The Ottoman-Persian rivalry created a political divide between Arab Sunnism and Iranian Shiism. Thus, Arab nationalists perceived Shiism as a distinctly Iranian phenomenon (Roy, 2007, p. 80).

During a 1963 coup, Colonel Abdul Salam Arif, empowered by the Ba'ath party, overthrew Abd al-Karim Qasim's regime. The Ba'ath party was originally established in Syria in 1947 and established a branch in Iraq in 1951 that had an ideology composed of a mixture of Pan-Arabism, Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, and anti-imperial sentiments. When Abdul Salam Arif died in 1966, his brother Abdul Rahman Arif took power. Two years later, in 1968, in yet another coup, the Ba'ath party, led by Hassan al-Bakir, overthrew Arif's government and al-Bakir ruled the country as Iraq's President until 1979 when Saddam Hussein rose to power (he remained in power until 2003).

In brief, between 1958 and 1968, Iraq endured four regime changes and numerous failed coups (Marr, 2018). It was clear that politicians did not have a common ideology or political orientation. The ruling elites were divided into Arab nationalists, who aspired to unite with other Arab states, and the left-leaning, who focused on domestic reform and bringing radical social change to the country.[7]

The Shiite-Ba'ath Regime Relations

As mentioned above, the Iraqi branch of the Ba'ath party was established in 1951. The party helped Abd al-Karim Qasim, Abdul Salam Arif, Abdul Rahman Arif, Hassan al-Bakir, and Saddam Hussein ascend to power. The party continued its effort to suppress any oppositional forces, considering them as threats to national unity. Kurdish nationalists, communists, and Sunni and Shiite Islamist activists all suffered under this regime's tyranny (Osman, 2014). For example, in the early 1970s, the Ba'ath regime arrested and executed activists and members of Sunni Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. As for the Shiites, Osman (2014) argues that, due to their strong organizational structure and demographic weight, the Ba'ath

[7] There were also the Kurds and their nationalist movement that aimed to gain autonomy and separation from Iraq.

regime had to take extra measures to repress their activism. The Shiites established their first movement, named the Islamic Da'wa Party, back in 1958. The party aimed for a revival of Islam and the Shiite Islamic doctrine amongst Iraqi Shiites (Alaaldin, 2017a). To repress their influence, the regime detained and executed the party's leader as well as several Shiite clerics. Further, in 1977, the regime banned the annual Shiite pilgrimage known as the *Arba'eenia* in which Shiites visit the Iraqi city of Karbala, which they consider a holy place. During this pilgrimage, Shiites commemorate the martyrdom of the grandson of the prophet Mohammed, Hussein bin Ali. The ban, eventually, led to a large-scale Shiite mobilization against the regime.

In addition to internal factors, other regional factors helped the Shiites to intensify their anti-regime discourse. The Islamic revolution in Iran, also known as the 1979 Revolution, overthrew the last Iranian monarch, replacing it with an Islamic republic. Iraqi Shiites perceived the revolution as a victory of Islam over secularism and materialism (Osman, 2014). Inspired by these events, demonstrations erupted in predominantly Shiite areas in southern Iraq. The Ba'ath regime suppressed demonstrations and detained and tortured thousands of participants and activists. In addition to outlawing the Da'wa Islamic Party, the regime executed Shiites' *Marja'* [spiritual leader], Muhammed Baqir al-Sadir in 1980.

Saeed (2019b) maintains that over the past four decades, Iran and some Arab states such as Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon have used Arab Shiites (including Iraqi Shiites) as proxies. On the one hand and to achieve its imperial ambition in the region, Iran has been treating the Arab Shiites issue as part of the transnational Shiite problem in the region, as if Shi'ism is a unified political project (El-Husseini & Leichtman, 2019; Saeed, 2019a). This has resulted in Arab Shiʿism being heavily influenced by Iran. These dynamics have arguably exacerbated the stereotypical doubts surrounding Shiites' connection and loyalty to Iran. On the other hand, Arab

states try to be either oppressive or more inclusive of Shiites hoping that they (Shiites) will help the state to confront Iran's influence in the region.

In retaliation to Ba'ath oppression of Arab Shiites, the events of the 1970s and the 1980s deepened their sense of communal victimhood and alienation. These feelings were further validated during the 1990s. To start, in August 1990, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded the neighboring country of Kuwait. The international community condemned the invasion, the U.S and its allies launching a military operation to liberate Kuwait. The Iraqi army was eventually defeated and retreated, which resulted in a weakened Iraqi government and army. Iraqi Shiites in the south and Iraqi Kurds in the north took advantage of the situation by starting two separate *Intifadah* [uprisings] against the Ba'ath regime. Out of the eighteen Iraqi provinces, the regime lost control of fourteen. The Shiites' uprising was characterized as chaotic and spontaneous (Alaaldin, 2017a). The regime launched a merciless counterattack against the Shiite areas, causing thousands of deaths and destroying several Shiite shrines (Osman, 2014). The Shiites' uprising was eventually completely repressed, and Saddam Hussein's regime continued persecuting Shiite activists and religious scholars. In 1999, the regime killed the *Marja'* Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadir and his two sons. These events left behind a Shiite community full of scars and fear.

Mawla (2019) insists that the totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein perpetuated sectarian divisions by promoting a narrative that framed the Shiites as *al-tayyfa "al-mariqa"* [the rogue sect]. Mawla (2019) and Kadhim (2013) both examine Saddam's efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to contain the activities of the *ḥawza* [the Shiʿi seminary in Najaf, Iraq], which is considered the main center of Shiite religious learning. Mawla and Kadhim contend that the regime was terrified of the rising numbers of worshippers who gathered around Shiite religious

rituals and weekly Friday prayers. Further, the regime doubted the loyalty of *hawza's* religious leaders and scholars to Iraq and Arabism, accusing them of being affiliated with Iran. To contain the Hawza and the related religious schools in both Najaf and Karbala, Saddam took extreme measures—from killing Shiite scholars to banning rituals. Kadhim (2013) points out that the Ba'ath's archives indicate that most of the key Ba'athists who were assigned to contain the Shiites' revival were party members who came from Shi'a families. The inclusion of Shi'a members was not meant to diversify the regime; rather, it was a mechanism used to oppress any oppositional groups. In this case, the regime pitted Shiites against one another so that the regime would survive.

Ba'ath Regime: The Intersection of Class, Geography, and Tribal Identity

Alongside sect, regional divisions, class, and tribe (East vs West) are prominent identity markers in Iraq. Scholars note that the intersection of tribe, class, and geography plays a key role in moderating sectarian sentiments in the country. Haddad (2017b) sustains that under the Ba'ath regime, sectarianism was influenced by considerations of class, regionalism, and locality more so than by dogma or jurisprudence. For the Ba'ath regime, religious heritage was not deployed as a marker of political identity; quite to the contrary, the regime professed secularism and displayed a paranoid aversion to displays of sect-specificity (Haddad, 2017b, pp. 368–369). Thus, it is safe to say that the regime relied on geography, class, and tribal identity rather than sect identity for its survival and stability.

As far as regional divisions, the east and southern areas of the Tigers are predominantly Shiite. Historically, the populations in these areas were associated with rural poverty, criminality, and a lack of culture. With the mass migration from rural to urban areas in the early twentieth

century, southerners came to be referred to as *shrug*—a derogatory term referring to migrant working-class people from predominantly southern Shiite areas who resided in urban Baghdad.[8]

In terms of class division, Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (1978) explain that during the early days of the Ba'ath regime in the 1950s, the presence of different ideologies polarized the Iraqi population, consequently perpetuating regional, tribal, and class divisions. The Iraqi Street was divided between supporters of Ba'athism and those of communism. A larger number of Sunnis were attracted to the ideals of Arab nationalism, whereas the poorest and most exploited classes (mostly Shiites in Baghdad and in the south of Iraq) were attracted to communism, particularly its promises of equality and social justice. As a result, and given that fewer Shiites were attracted to Ba'athism, mostly Sunnis occupied the ruling class; this is not to say that there were not any Shiites, but there were fewer of them than Sunnis.

Finally, the regime's relationship to and sentiment toward tribalism was not static. Baram (1997) points out that when the Ba'ath party came to power in 1968, it denounced tribalism. In its first communique, the party declared, "We are against religious sectarianism (*al-ta'ifiyya*), racism, and tribalism (*al-qabaliyya*)," suggesting that tribalism was the epitome of backwardness (Baram, 1997, p. 1). In the 1970s and 1980s, tribalism continued to be perceived as a threat to party rule and socialist ideals envisioned by the Ba'ath. The party explicitly expressed these views in the government's publications, such as internal party documents (i.e., the party's congress reports) and public ones (e.g., the government's newspaper). This relationship between the state and tribalism gradually changed when Saddam Hussein came to power. Most of the ruling rank came from tribal backgrounds and relied on tribal and kinship networks to access sensitive positions within the government, such as the security services (Baram, 1997). For

[8] For more on *Shurug* see (al-Wardi, 1966; Batatu, 2012).

example, for security positions, the president's guard, the Republic, and the Special Republican Guard, Saddam Hussein recruited people from certain tribes, i.e., his own Abu al-Nasir tribe, the Jubbur, and the Ubaid (all Sunnis). Only later did he recruit people from other tribes, including some Shiites. Saddam drastically shifted the state rhetoric; thus, the tribe became the epitome of Arab values, especially during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). For the regime, it was imperative to exploit the Arab identity of the Arab tribes to promote anti-Iranian feelings.

In summary, the Ba'ath regime was accused of exhibiting sect-centricity, albeit subtly, by sustaining a set of power relations that favored one sectarian group over the other. And in many instances, Shiites' exclusion may have been driven by class and regional or tribal discrimination rather than sectarian identity. The Ba'ath regime institutionally discriminated against southern areas. Even in Baghdad, working-class southerners, who lived in the south of the city, lacked basic services. Further, due to tribal and kinship relations, the regime was closer to Sunnis than to Shiites. These factors coupled with the regime's efforts to repress Shiite revival—for example, banning rituals and persecuting Shiite scholars—fostered feelings of sectarian victimhood amongst Shiites.

The American Invasion in 2003 and al-Muhasasa al-Ta'ifia [Quota System]

The hegemony of Iraqi Sunnis came to an end in 2003, when the United States and allied forces removed Saddam Hussein and set up a quota system. *al-Muhasasa al-Ta'ifia*, or quota system, refers to dividing jobs and positions based on the percentage of Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds in the population. After Saddam Hussein's removal from power, the United States and its allies set up a temporary transitional government for Iraq called the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). For more than a year (May 2003-June 2004), the CPA held executive, legislative, and judicial authority over the Iraqi government. The CPA created the Iraq

Governing Council (IGC)—considered the first political body after Saddam's regime. It immediately became evident that sectarian apportionment was the basis for forming the IGC with Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurds as the three main blocks. Dodge (2018b) sustains that since the 1990s, ideas of *al-Muhasasa al-Ta'ifia* were popular among exiled Iraqi politicians and parties that opposed Saddam's regime. When Saddam was removed, oppositional parties and exiled politicians—defended and extended by the US, Iranian, and Saudi Arabian intervention—agreed to work within *al-Muhasasa al-Ta'ifia*.

The *Muhasasa* system enabled a class of politicians, who claimed to represent their distinct communities and relied on ethnic and sectarian rhetoric, to gain power, the consequences of which have been detrimental to social and national cohesion. The system has caused civil wars, pervasive corruption, and institutional weakness. Since 2003, the three blocks of power—the Sunnis, the Shiites, and the Kurds—have been exploiting government resources for personal and partisan interests. They use government payrolls to pay their members and followers and employ people who pledging alliances rather than demonstrating merit. This has resulted in increased social and political unrest (Dodge, 2019; Mohammed & Alrebh, 2020).

In 2005, the first national elections took place and Iraqis voted for the Transitional National Assembly. The Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis each separately formed coalitions to participate in the elections. Again, it was clear that the coalitions ran on ethno-sectarian platforms, and Iraqis were mobilized to go vote as members of a specific group. For the first time, the Shiite Islamist coalition [The United Iraqi Alliance] secured 47 percent of the votes. The coalition took control of key positions within the newly formed government, including the position of prime minister. This came after the Shiite *Marja'* Ayatollah al-Sistani endorsed and encouraged participation in the election. The Kurds secured approximately 25 percent, while

Sunnis fared poorly after they largely boycotted the elections. Based on the 2005 election results, the first permanent government was formed in 2006 with the Kurdish senior politician Jalal Talabani appointed president and the exiled Shiite politician Nuri al-Maliki appointed prime minister.

In a special report published by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Marr Phebe compared and contrasted Iraq's new political leaders and their visions for the future with those of the Ba'ath regime. According to the report, the change since the Ba'th regime is revolutionary because of the forces shaping the new leaders and their political orientation. The Ba'ath was a nationalist regime committed to a strong central government, but it was replaced by political pluralism and disparate views, with no common vision on Iraq's direction forward (Marr, 2006, p. 1)

The same report compared the ethnic and sect compositions of both governments in both eras (see Table 2.1). For the Ba'ath regime, the author analyzed the Revolutionary Command Council and the Regional Command of the party, some members of which also occupied key ministerial positions. For the new government, the author examined the presidents, vice presidents, prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, and ministers of foreign affairs, finance, defense, interior, and state for national security. As Table 2.1 shows, the shift is indeed dramatic, with Shiites leading the majority and Sunnis dropping from key positions.

Table 2.1 Ethnic and sectarian comparison between Ba'th regime and new leaders

Ethnic and Sect Identity	Ba'th Regime	New Leaders
Shi'a Arab	28% (5)	52% (11)
Sunni Arab	61% (11)	24% (5)
Kurd	6% (1)	24% (5)
Unknown	6% (1)	0%

With that said, this transitional period was characterized by an outbreak of terrorism and sectarian tensions (Hamasaeed & Nada, 2019). On the one hand, different radical Sunni groups, such as the *Tawhid*, surfaced. This group allied with al-Qaida and launched a series of attacks on Shiites and their holy shrines. On the other hand, some radical Shiite militia took the initiative to counterattack. Among powerful Shiite militias were *Jaish al-Mahdi* [the Mahdi Army] and the Badr Brigade, both of which have histories of allegedly committing atrocities against Sunnis (Dodge, 2014). The rise in violence between Sunnis and Shiites escalated particularly between 2006 and 2008. According to Iraq's Health Ministry and the Baghdad morgue, in 2006 more than three thousand and five hundred civilians were killed in July alone. The Sunni and Shiite armed groups and militias targeted each other based on places of worship (mosques vs. shrines), one's affiliation with a political party associated with a particular sect, one's name,[9] place of birth, and neighborhood (Al-Khalidi & Tanner, 2006; Haddad, 2013).[10] This was especially true in Baghdad—a city known for its mixed population, with some neighborhoods being either predominantly Sunni or predominantly Shiite and others being mixed.

De-Ba'athification Process

De-Ba'athification was a controversial policy introduced by the CPA and implemented by subsequent governments in order to remove Ba'ath party members or affiliates from the public sector and ban them from future employment. This policy left an immediate and profound impact on state institutions and led sectarian insurgency that evolved in 2004 and intensified from 2006 to 2008. The first order of the policy that was implemented on May 16th, 2003, states:

[9] For example, Omar and Ali are two common names amongst Sunnis and Shiites, respectively. In post-2003 Iraq, many civilians whose names are Omar and Ali have become the direct target of sectarian violence (Al-Khalidi & Tanner, 2006). The qualitative data I collected for this dissertation support this statement (see chapter 6).
[10] The data I collected for this dissertation (see chapter 6) support this statement.

> This order implements the declaration by eliminating the party's structures and removing its leadership from positions of authority and responsibility in Iraqi society. By this means, the Coalition Provisional Authority will ensure that representative government in Iraq is not threatened by Ba'athist elements returning to power and that those in positions of authority in the future are acceptable to the people of Iraq.

As a result, thousands of doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals lost their jobs and, consequently, the country wasted a huge portion of human resources (Zeren, 2017). In addition, the Sunnis repeatedly portrayed de-Ba'athification as "de-Sunnificiation." The Sunnis complained that the policy had become a sectarian instrument wielded to prevent Sunnis from participating in public life (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013, p. 17). The policy was partially revoked in 2004, when the government started the process of reinstating Ba'athists. However, the process was vague, long, and bureaucratic. In 2008, the policy was revised by the Iraqi parliament through legislation called the Accountability and Justice Act (AJA). AJA aimed to return competent professionals to their jobs and grant pension benefits to those who were eligible. The new law did contain some improvements, but it also preserved much of the old system. To this day, the de-Ba'athification process has not been formally ended; it is currently implemented, albeit under different commissions and legislations. This policy remains one of the most controversial laws implemented in post-2003 Iraq, and it has accelerated the country's descent into sectarianism, unemployment, and terrorism.

The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki to Power

It is important to point out that there are internal divisions within each of the three communities discussed above.[11] Jabar (2018) argues that the greatest divide within the Iraqi Shiʿa community is between the "insiders"—those who remained in Iraq under the Baʿath like the Sadrist movement—and the formerly exiled groups like the Da'wa Party led by Nouri al-Maliki

[11] For more on the Kurdish internal divisions, see Mohammed & Alrebh, 2020.

and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) led by Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. After 2003, the rivalry between these political parties and their clerical families attracted a separate urban following in Iraq. As early as 2007, rivalries between the al-Sadr movement and exiled politicians and parties escalated. During his first term, profound rivalries rose between al-Maliki and al-Sadr, with al-Maliki managing to fragment the Sadrist movement, which led to the rise of a new Shiite party and militia Asa'ib Ahl al Haq (AAH), also known as the League of the Righteous. Within the ISCI, its armed wing, Badr Brigade, left the council and formed a separate political party under the leadership of Hadi al-Amiri—an exiled Shiite politician who came to prominence in 2014 in the fight against ISIS.

Between 2008 and 2011, violence declined, sectarian politics retreated, and militias and insurgencies were crippled (Haddad, 2015, p. 17). Nevertheless, tensions re-escalated again in 2012 after the Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki during his second term (2006-2014), accused Sunni politicians of terrorism and conspiracy against Shiite politicians. Tensions escalated when al-Maliki accused Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi of terrorism and sentenced him to death (al-Hashemi managed to escape the country). Also, the house of the Sunni finance minister, Rafi al-Issawi, was raided and nearly 150 of his guards and staff members were reportedly arrested. These tensions led the Sunni bloc to boycott parliament and cabinet.

It is important to mention that al-Maliki's government antagonized not only the Sunnis but also the Kurds and other Shiite forces such as the Sadrist movement and the Supreme Islamic Council. Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds accused al-Maliki of taking an authoritarian approach to government and of fueling sectarianism. Particularly, the Sunnis accused the prime minister of implementing discriminatory policies that unfairly targeted Sunnis. The tense sectarian climate

eventually fueled the Sunni insurgency in late 2012 and early 2013 in which hundreds of people in predominantly Sunni areas (such as Fallujah, Diyala, Salahadin, and Mosul) protested against al-Maliki's government. In response, in Shiite-dominated areas such as Basra, Diwaniyah, Karbala, and Babil, thousands of pro-Maliki groups protested, voicing their support for the then prime minister.

Figure 2.2 Iraq's Map

Given al-Maliki's sectarianist politics and inability to overcome ethnic and sectarian divisions, in 2012, the Sadrist bloc allied with the Kurdish bloc—led by Masoud Barzani—and the Sunni bloc—led by Ayad. These rivalries further divided the Iraqi street and deepened Shiite internal divisions.

In the first phase of this study, I explore the impact of the sectarian politics—exploded in post-2003 Iraq—on people's behaviors and attitudes. In this phase of the study, I specifically look at sect-affiliated and sect-funded TV channels—that exploded in the aftermath of the

invasion—and the ways in which they impact on Iraqis discriminatory attitudes. I expect that the more exposure to those channels the more likely one would discriminate against the other sect.

Another important factor I explore in this phase of the study is the association between religion and sectarianism. In Haddad's words:

> In the era of the nation-state, sectarian competition in the single nation-state is just as likely, if not more likely, to be animated by contested national truths rather than religious ones, thereby rendering a country's sects into loosely defined collectives that may often be perceived more along economic or regional lines than strictly according to sectarian affiliation. (Haddad, 2017a, p. 150).

Haddad's comments address the impotence of distinguishing between religion and sectarianism. In the next chapter, I expand on this discussion while presenting the literature review and I argue that the association between religion and sectarianism is complex and not linear. Thus, I do not expect a direct negative impact of religion on people's discriminatory attitudes.

The End of the al-Maliki Era and the War Against ISIS

Al-Maliki became the prime minister in 2006, serving two terms until 2014. Later he aimed to get reelected for a third term; however, he struggled and was ultimately asked to step down. Due to his sectarian and exclusivist policies, he lost the support of his party, the president, the Shite *Marja'*, the United States, and Iran. Pressures mounted when in June 2014, the terrorist group ISIS took control over key Iraqi cities amid a humiliating collapse of the Iraqi army. Cities such as Mosul, Ramadi, and Fallujah—with predominant Sunni populations—fell under the control of ISIS. Al-Maliki was blamed for creating the conditions that led to the rise of ISIS. Overwhelmed with his politics, some Sunni tribes and ex-members of the Ba'ath regime allegedly assisted ISIS in taking control of those cities (Mabon & Kumarasamy, 2019). In the beginning, al-Maliki refused to step aside. Then, in an unprecedented move, the Shia *Marja'* Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani took a political stance by responding to a letter that al-Maliki's own

party, *al-Da'wa*, sent him, asking him for instructions on whether al-Maliki should stay in power. Al-Sistani responded, stating that Iraq needed a new leader who was acceptable to all parties. Al-Maliki finally stepped down and the Shia politician Haider al-Abadi was seated as the new prime minister. Al-Abadi's government, with the help of the United States and its allies, finally declared victory over ISIS in 2017. Yet, Iraq still faces the danger of dormant ISIS cells across the country. Further, the Sunnis have paid a heavy price for the war against ISIS. The infrastructures of the cities that fell under ISIS control were destroyed, thousands of people have been killed, and millions have been displaced. Mosul in particular has been impacted since it was the main battleground of this war. More importantly, the alleged help Sunnis offered to ISIS has portrayed them as "traitors" who opened their doors to terrorists (see chapter 6).

The Shiite Marja' and the Shiite Militias

Since 2003, the Shiite *Marja'* and the Shiite militias have played a key role in shaping Iraq's politics and sectarian dynamics. Throughout the history of Iraq, the Shiite *Marja'* and other religious leaders held no formal offices in the state, as the state often perceived religious leaders as traditional, outdated, and undesirable. Similarly, under the current Iraqi constitution approved in 2005, Iraq is a democratic, parliamentary state and religious leaders still hold no formal offices. Yet, since 2003 state institutions have been so weak that they often rely on the support of non-state actors (specifically the Shiite *Marja'*) to survive and gain popular support. In al-Qarawee's words "[in post-2003 Iraq] religious entities have been recognized as cultural actors who have the legitimacy to operate in an increasingly sectarianized public sphere" (Al-Qarawee, 2019, p. 496). Despite the institution of the Grand *Marja'* maintaining its autonomy, its role has been prominent in some key events in post-2003 Iraq politics (Al-Qarawee, 2019; Rahimi, 2007).

In the first event, the Shiite *Marja'* Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani closely monitored the drafting of the first Iraqi constitution after the removal of Saddam and insisted on recognizing Islam as the fundamental component of the constitution. After it was drafted and was set to be confirmed by a national referendum, al-Sistani urged people to vote to approve the constitution.

In the second event, when Iraq faced the threat of ISIS in the summer of 2014, al-Sistani issued a *fatwa* [a religious ruling] calling on Iraqi civilians to mobilize in support of the Iraqi military to fight against ISIS. The *fatwa* led to a mass mobilization of citizens—mainly from middle and southern cities—who joined newly formed and long-standing Shi'a paramilitary organizations. The mass mobilization led to the establishment of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—also known as *al-Ḥashd al-Sha'bī*). The PMF is now a state-sponsored umbrella organization composed of more than 60 forces, mostly Shiites but including some Sunni, Turkmen, Yezidi, and Christian forces too. The PMF played a prominent role in liberating Iraqi cities from ISIS. Their success turned them into a permanent feature of Iraq's social, political, and security landscapes. They refer to themselves as a movement of national liberation and as a religious crusade against evil. In fact, in Shia areas, they are held in higher regard than the Iraqi army (Watling, 2016).

Nonetheless, there are controversies surrounding the presence of the PMF in Iraq's political landscape. These controversies stem from the ambiguity of their status. To regulate the PMF, in 2016 the Iraqi government passed legislation that made them an official component of Iraq's security forces, subject to military law, with equal status to the army (Watling, 2016). However, the full integration of the PMF into Iraq's security forces is complex and the state's control over some of them is still weak. Further, the presence of some extremist and some pro-Iranian militias among the PMF has been the subject of significant debate. Some of these militias

are Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Kataib Hezbollah, Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, and the Badr Brigade. They allegedly receive considerable financial support and patronage from Iran and have capitalized on Sistani's call to arm, sustain, legitimize, and consolidate their presence. Some of these militias have been accused of committing sectarian atrocities and human rights abuses during the war against ISIS (2014-2017) (Alaaldin, 2017b, p. 1). Given the ambiguity of their status and sectarian atrocities committed by some of them, the international media as well as some Sunnis (see chapter 6) describe them as an Iranian-backed coalition of Shia militia, sectarian militia, Iranian militia, or anti-Sunni forces. While some of these perspectives may hold some truth, the reality is that the PMF are comprised of a spectrum of actors. In Haddad' words:

> Rather than being any one thing, the PMU are a spectrum of up to an estimated 140,000 fighters and over 40 paramilitary units who will vary in their relationship with various Iraqi political actors, with Iran, and with each other. Yet, to this day, many people—nowhere more so than in the Arab world—are either oblivious to or dismissive of this fact. In this, there is a stark contrast between discourse on and criticism of the PMU within Iraq and beyond. (Haddad, 2018, p. 3)

Therefore, it is an oversimplification to describe the PMF as a Shia, sectarian, or Iranian militia. There are 40,000 Sunni fighters among the PMF who helped fight ISIS (Mansour, 2017). Haddad (2018) argues that the presence of the Sunni fighters among the PMF forces as well as the Sunni population's contact with the PMF has helped the Sunnis' view evolve from the zero-sum fear with which they may have regarded the PMF in 2014 to something more grounded in personal experience that allows for varying shades of grey between the poles of terror and adulation (Haddad, 2018, p. 3)

While I agree that the PMF is comprised of a spectrum of actors, the data I present in chapter 6 reveal that Sunnis are still fearful and suspicious of these forces, and their views have not evolved the way Haddad asserts. It is worthwhile to further investigate the extent to which

the PMF has exacerbated sectarian tensions between Iraq's Arab Sunnis and Shiites during the fight against ISIS. I dedicate part of chapter 6 to this discussion from a micro-level.

Anti-Corruption, Anti-Sectarian Protests

The American occupation has brought terrorism, sectarianism, and corruption to Iraq. Since 2003, the class of political elites—defended and extended by regional and international powers—have increased ethnic and sectarian tensions and have failed to provide dignified living conditions for citizens. Since 2011, Iraqis have expressed their frustration with the system and have been demanding for change. These protests are often referred to as "post-sectarian," "anti-sectarian," "trans-sectarian," or "de-sectarian." For example, Simon Mabon (Mabon, 2019a, 2020a) refers to these protests as part of the *de-sectarianization* process. In his words:

> If one accepts the premise of the sectarianization thesis then there is scope for an antithesis, concerning the reworking of this process, of de-sectarianization, a concept that shares characteristics with the actions of protesters across Lebanon and Iraq. A fundamental theme of de-sectarianization is the premise that if sectarian difference is constructed in an effort to ensure regime survival, then it can be de-constructed, leading to a re-imagining of political life and the role of religion in it. (p. 2).

The respondents that I interviewed for this study often referred to these protests as anti-sectarian, a hopeful move toward a post-sectarian Iraq, and evidence that if elites want to divide citizens, citizens want to unite. Or in Mabon's words, if elites want to construct sectarianism, citizens want to de-construct it. Below I discuss the series of protests that erupted in the country from 2011 to the present day.

2011: "The People Want to Reform the System"

While there have been demonstrations in support of politicians or a specific political party—such as the 2012 pro-al-Maliki demonstrations—that is not an indication that all Iraqis are content with the *muhasasa* system. As early as 2011 and inspired by the wave of the Arab Spring protests that erupted across the Middle East and North Africa, thousands of Iraqis took to

the streets to protest the government's sectarian character. For several months, Iraqis across the country protested under the slogan 'the people want to reform the system.' They demanded reform of the national security system, the investigation into federal corruption, and better public services such as water and electricity. The government reacted severely, putting down the protests by arresting and detaining activists, journalists, and intellectuals.

2015: "In the Name of Religion the Thieves Have Robbed us"

Jabar (2018) argues that the 2011 protests gave birth to a social movement that later inspired the 2015 and the 2019 protests. In 2015, while the state was fighting ISIS in the northwest part of the country, Shia citizens in predominantly Shiite central and southern cities held protests against the Shiite Islamists parties for their corruption and monopolization of power in the name of religion (Jabar, 2018, p. 7). The movement started in the rich oil province of Basra where the government has been least effective in providing basic services such as water and electricity. These protests spread to Baghdad, demanding a radical change of the government and the *muhasasa* system. The *muhasasa* system that had failed to resonate with the public had also resulted in a steady reduction in voter turnout in the 2010, 2014, and 2018 parliamentary elections (Dodge, 2019).

During the 2015 protests and in reference to the class of politicians who have been politicizing Islam and ethnic and sect identities since 2003, Iraqis expressed their frustration through controversial slogans such as "*bismil deen baguna al-haramiya,"* which translates to "in the name of religion the thieves have robbed us." This slogan particularly upset Shiite religious politicians who accused protesters of anti-religion and of adopting foreign agendas to plot against the government. It is worth mentioning that senior clergymen and religious scholars in Najaf and Karbala were just as frustrated with the financial and administrative corruption in the

Shiites majority government. They supported the ongoing protests; however, the gap between them and the citizens was that the latter demanded a secular or a 'civil' state, while clergymen and scholars were skeptical of such demands and of slogans that seemed directed against religion. During the 2015 protests, mutual mistrust deepened between the two parties when some young Najaf seminary students tried to join the protests in Baghdad, only to be stopped by the protesters. This indicates how frustrated Iraqis were with clergymen and their involvement in politics.

In response to popular pressure for change, some Shiite political parties and clergymen aimed to redefine the role of Islamism in Iraq's politics. For example, during the 2018 parliamentary elections, the Sadrist movement allied with the Iraqi Communist Party. Further, the Shiite *Marja* Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani urged people not to reelect corrupt politicians if they were Shiites. Thus, political parties that benefited from the *muhasasa* system ignored public pressure for reform, instead forming alliances with each other and eventually winning seats using the system.

2019-Present: The October Revolution "We Want a Homeland"

On October 1, 2019, civil activists organized one of the largest protests since 2003. Millions of Iraqis went onto the streets in the central and southern cities of the country voicing the slogan "we want a homeland." With this slogan, protesters have been demanding a sovereign state that protects people from corruption, terrorism, sectarianism, and the interference of foreign powers, a homeland where all Iraqis belong regardless of ethnic, sect, and religious backgrounds. Protesters have issued a manifesto in which they demanded better services, accountability for corrupt politicians, and the overthrow of the government that has been in place since 2003. They demand the replacement of the current government with secular nationalism and civic

citizenship. To demobilize the protest movement, the government responded with extended violence and repression. Hundreds of people have reportedly been killed and thousands more injured, arrested, and tortured. Further, tens of activists, journalists, and artists who have taken part in the protests have been kidnapped and assassinated. As I am writing this chapter, May 9th, 2021, yet another activist, Ihab Al-Wazni was assassinated outside his home by unknown armed men in Karbala city.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented historical events to argue that sectarian dynamics in Iraq have been shaped by competition over political and economic power and by elites who, in order to survive, have instrumentalized ethnic and sect identities. This chapter also displayed how sectarianism in a modern phenomenon exasperated particularly after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and created a space in which tensions escalated between the Sunni and the Shiites.

Furthermore, in this chapter I discussed the end of Nouri al-Maliki's sectarian politics and the series of protests that broke out in 2019 demanding for a change. I argue that these developments mark a new era for sectarian relations and Iraqis have since become more aware of the role politicians play to exasperate tensions in the country.

CHAPTER 3 : LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 3 takes an interdisciplinary approach to defining sectarianism. It draws from and combines theories from different disciplines—sociology, social psychology, political science, anthropology, international relations, and history—to define sectarianism. I extensively borrow from Fannar Haddad, Nader Hashemi, Toby Dodge, Morten Valbjorn, Adham Saouli, Eric Davis, Thomas Fibiger, Raymond Hinnebusch, Ussama Makdisi, Ali al-Wardi, Azmi Bishara, Haider Saeed, Joanne Randa Nucho, and many others to argue the following:

1. Sectarianism is the politicization of ethnic and religious differences by political elites to achieve mundane goals.
2. Sectarianism can be internalized, thus impacting people's behaviors and attitudes.
3. Sectarianism can manifest in various forms that range from aggressive to covert at both institutional (macro) and personal (micro) levels.

Theoretical Framework

The death of the Prophet Mohammed in the year 632 C.E. caused a schism between Sunnis and Shiites over who should be the prophet's successor. The Shia—also known as *shi'at 'ali* [the partisan of Ali]—believe that the prophet designated his cousin and son-in-law Ali as his successor. The majority of Muslims, however, are adherents of the *sunna* [the prophetic traditions] and do not think the successor should be a descendent of the prophet's immediate family (Leichtman, 2009, p. 324). There are indeed doctrinal differences between the two groups; however, the question of succession remains the main political contention.[12] Yet, these historical disagreements do not explain the contemporary sectarian conflict in the Islamic-Arab

[12] It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to analyze the doctrinal differences between Sunnism and the Shiitism.

world. Below I discuss three main schools of thought, Primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, that explain the complexities of sectarianism in the Middle East: I discuss how primordialism and instrumentalism offer an outdated and simplistic argument on sectarianism. I also demonstrate how the literature has moved beyond that argument to offer a more careful analysis of the phenomenon.

Schools of Thought: Primordialism, Instrumentalism, Constructivism and Beyond

Primordialists emphasize that deep-rooted biological and cultural factors such as genes, kindship, and evolutionary psychology cause conflicts. In Harvey's (2000) words, primordialists assert that "ethnic identities have biological and even genetic foundations, and … the motivation for ethnic and kinship affiliation comes from these socio-psychological forces internal to the individual and related to primordial human needs for security and, more importantly, survival" (p. 40). Further, members of the group are considered "family' who are connected biologically to one another through 'common descent and the 'other' is perceived as the rival primordial group (Dixon, 2018). From this standpoint, ethnic and sectarian identities have a powerful impact on individual and group behavior: they have the potential to predispose people to violence.

From this primordial perspective, sectarianism is a derogatory term used to suggest that the 'excessive,' intolerant, and 'rigid' (if not fundamentalist) attachment to religious belief is responsible for the current conflicts in the Middle East (Dixon, 2018). Such conceptualization is simplistic because it emphasizes the role that religion and sect, rather than politics, play in ethnic and sectarian tensions in the region.

Western powers have used primordial narratives to "manage historical conflicts" in the region. For example, after World War I, Western imperialism intervened to allegedly protect Christians in Lebanon from persecutions and to "civilize" the region by imposing a form of

consociationalism. Consociationalism is the idea that in a pluralistic state like Lebanon, unity can be preserved by allowing communal elites to construct a power-sharing settlement in which all groups are equally represented. Accordingly, in Lebanon, a sectarian quota system known as the *al-Mithaq al Watani* [the National Pact] was officially born in 1943. Instead of "managing historical" conflicts, the quota system resulted in institutionalizing sectarian identities, creating a profane platform on which sectarian identities started to compete with one another over contested national truths and access to politics (Haddad, 2014a).

It is worth mentioning that primordialism is considered outdated and simplistic. Yet, it is still possible to occasionally identify primordial positions among world leaders, public intellectuals, media commentators, and (rarely) academics. These positions wrongfully explain away sectarian tensions as being merely a historical function of the primordial antagonism between Sunnis and Shi'as. For example, some of the famous quotes used to highlight the primordial argument in western politicians' and journalists' opinions come from Barack Obama and Thomas Freidman. In his seventh and final State of the Union speech, the former United States president said, "the Middle East is going through a transformation that will play out for a generation, rooted in conflicts that date back millennia" (Adam, 2016, para. 3). Similarly, Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times* that the Shiite pro-Iranian and Sunni pro-Saudi clashes in Yemen were a seventh-century struggle over who is the rightful heir to the Prophet Muhammad—Shiites or Sunnis (Friedman, 2016, para. 9). In addition to politicians and journalists, Zelin and Smyth (2019) identified primordial voices among Middle Eastern actors. In their discussion of the "vocabulary of sectarianism" used in Syria, they noticed that both Shia and Sunni Islamist groups framed the conflicts in Syria as an existential cosmic religious battle,

which dates back to the time of the Battle of Karbala.[13] Among academics, Genevieve Abdo (2016) and Vali Nasr (2007) are often highlighted as scholars with some primordial perspectives. Abdo, for example, argues that some aspects of sectarianism are due to a struggle for political power while some others stem from religious differences, and each cause fuels the other. Similarly, Nasr conceptualizes the Shia-Sunni conflict as "a struggle for the soul of Islam—a great war of competing theologies and conceptions of sacred history" (Nasr, 2007, p. 20).

Following Said (1985), a growing body of literature on sectarianism in the Middle East challenges this lazy and Orientalist approach, which constructs for the rest of the world a biased image of the Middle East. Dixon (2018) argues that this primordial narrative emphasizes the role of religion and sect rather than politics in explaining the current conflicts in the Middle East. The danger of this narrative is that it implies that adherence to Islam leads directly to violence.

Furthermore, primordialism is considered flawed because it fails to take into account the influence of the multiple identities with which Middle Easterners self-identify (i.e., national, ethnic, religious, and sectarian) and the fact that these identities are malleable and change over time. Particularly, they fail to explain the intersection of these identities. Sect identity, for example, transcends nationality and ethnicity; there are Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Sunni Turks, etc. just as there are Shia Kurds, Shia Iranians, and Shia Senegalese. An interesting example is the case of Iraqi Kurds who are majority Sunni—but also some Shia—yet have their own separatist ethno-nationalist aspirations: they aspire to separate from Arab Sunnis and Arab Shias all together to establish their own Kurdish state. Also, primordialists fail to explain why communities that have been characterized by sectarian identities often have younger generations

[13] The Battle of Karbala was a brief military engagement that occurred on October 10th, 680 between al-Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, and the army of Umayyad caliph Yazid. The date of the battle is also known as the 10th of *Muharram*, and it is considered an annual holy day of public mourning by Shiites Muslims.

who think less of sectarian identities. For example, the findings of this dissertation support the argument that younger Iraqis think less of sectarian identities than older generations and are less likely to self-identify with them than their elders are (see chapter 6).

Furthermore, primordialism is rooted in methodological collectivism: the idea that society is the "whole" that is more than its parts and that the society affects an individual's aims and behaviors (Agassi, 1960). Accordingly, primordialists assume that forms of collective consciousness can be ascribed to groups, i.e., all Iraqi Shi'a think X, all Sunni Arabs think Y, and all Kurds think Z (Davis, 2010). Finally, primordialists do not take into account the impact of national, regional, and international factors on the mobilization of these identities (Martini et al., 2019, p. 4). Speaking of regional and international factors, instrumentalists and constructivists provide a better argument. Bellow, I discuss each perspective extensively.

Instrumentalists—constructivists as well—reject the primordial historical argument. Instrumentalists argue that ethnoreligious identities are not fixed but changeable, and accordingly, ethnopolitical leaders use media and culture to manipulate these identities by either emphasizing in-group and out-group similarities and differences or invoking the fear of assimilation, domination, and annihilation (Brass, 1979; Laitin, 1986).

In the Middle East context, instrumentalists conceptualize sectarianism as a recent and modern phenomenon that fluctuates, depending on identity politics rather than religious piety. Therefore, sectarianism is an epiphenomenon stemming from social, economic, or political contestation where elites and politicians use these identities to cause mass mobilization, to deflect popular attention, to divide an opposition, or to leverage regional rivalries (Valbjørn, 2020, p. 95).

Often, instrumentalists state that the Sunni-Shia divide began with the nineteenth-century breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of nation-states by Western colonial powers. According to this perspective, colonial powers created a profane platform on which sectarian identities started to compete with one another over contested national truths and access to political power; thus, sectarian identity was institutionalized.

Taking the newly established state of Iraq in 1921 as an example, instrumentalists would argue that because Arab Shi'a had a politically salient and culturally autonomous sectarian identity, they demanded fair recognition and representation in the government. However, British and Iraqi officials perceived Arab Shi'a as reluctant Iraqis because the Shiites had initially fought against the colonial power and later on against the newly established Iraqi state and its assimilation and homogenization impulses (Dawisha, 2009, Chapter 2; Kadhim, 2010). For example, the Shiites challenged the Nationality Law of 1924, which was drafted by British officials and approved by Iraqi ones. This law divided Iraqis into two categories, "original" and "non-original," based on the citizenship they held under Ottoman rule. Those who held Persian citizenship, often Shi'a Arabs, were registered as "non-original," whereas those who held Ottoman citizenship were registered as "original" (Saleh, 2013). Instrumentalists would perceive those tensions in Iraq as a state-Shi'a issue and not a Sunni-Shi'a issue because the Iraqi state was neither anti-Shi'a nor did it want to turn them into Sunnis (Haddad, 2017a).

Another geopolitical factor that instrumentalists note is the Islamic Iranian revolution in 1979, which spread fear across different Middle Eastern states. The Saudi kingdom and other Sunni authoritarian regimes invested significant resources in hopes of undermining the power and appeal of the Iranian revolution. Sunni majority states portrayed the Iranian revolution within a sectarian framework and referred to it as a Shi'a/Persian phenomenon. The invested resources

resulted in an increasing anti-Shi'a sentiment across the Sunni world (Hashemi & Postel, 2017b). Instrumentalists—and constructivists as well—argue that since the Iranian revolution, both Saudi Arabia and Iran have strived to expand their leadership in the Islamic world across the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Asia. Both of these poles of power have used sectarian narratives to mobilize sectarian movements in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Afghanistan.

Furthermore, for instrumentalists, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab Spring marked further turning points in Saudi-Iran relations and, subsequently, sectarian relations in the region (Haddad, 2014a; Makdisi, 2017; Salloukh, 2017b; Sayigh, 2017). Since 2000, the Shiite political party Hezbollah—backed by Iran—became more popular in Lebanon. Similarly, Iran has gained significant hegemony in post-2003 Iraq with the rise and alliance of the country's Shi'a Islamic parties. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia blamed Iran for the protests in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia (Mathiesen, 2017). On the other hand, Iran and Assad's regime—backed by Iran—blamed Saudi Arabia for the nonviolent protests in Syria and the rise of the oppositional Green movement in Iran during the summer of 2009 (Hashemi & Postel, 2017b).

Instrumentalists' analysis is agency-oriented, and it stresses that elites can and do in fact use ethnicity, sect, gender, or class to mobilize groups against one another, implying that identities are highly malleable and sometimes made more salient. The danger of this narrative is that it is used—and sometimes mixed with the primordial narrative—to justify western imperialism over the region. This narrative, again, stresses that 'evil' politicians and dictators manipulate and create antagonistic identities to achieve their interests; thus, they must be replaced. This narrative became particularly popular after 9/11 and it has since been applied to Iraq, Syria, and Libya (Dixon, 2018). In the case of Iraq, for example, this narrative was used to

remove Saddam Hussein with the goal of replacing him with a more inclusive form of governance. Yet, the consequence was the exacerbation of sectarianism—which the West sometimes mistakenly conceptualizes as "primordial."

Similar to primordialism, instrumentalism is also considered reductionist and flawed. It offers a top-down perspective on sectarianism, viewing the political elite as an outside class unaffected or unconstrained by culture, ethnonationalism, and sectarian identities. As far as popular sectarianism—or as I refer to it as sectarianism on the individual level—instrumentalists deny that it exists. According to this perspective, sectarianism is some kind of "surface phenomenon," and the possibility that people may internalize it is overlooked (Darwich & Fakhoury, 2016; Lynch, 2016a).

When reviewing the literature on sectarianism in the Middle East, it quickly becomes evident that scholars have tentatively moved beyond primordialism and instrumentalism because of their shortcomings. Scholars suggest a range of alternative theoretical approaches as a kind of third or in-between position allowing them to move beyond the pitfalls of these two schools. In his insightful piece, "Beyond the beyond(s): On the (many) third way(s) beyond primordialism and instrumentalism in the study of sectarianism," Morten Valbjørn (2020) identified in the literature the fact that scholars are offering various approaches as the potential "new savior" to substitute for primordialism and instrumentalism. Valbjørn has found that by far *constructivism* has officially become the new conventional wisdom in the debate on sectarianism.

The concept of constructivism is borrowed from studies of ethnicity, nationalism, and identity politics. Contrary to pure primordialism, constructivism conceptualizes collective identities—including sect identities—as imagined and socially constructed in the context of modernity, as opposed to being somehow "innate." Similar to instrumentalism, constructivism

agrees that these identities can be constructed and de-constructed. However, contrary to instrumentalism, which argues that elites manipulate identities, constructivism sees identities as deeply rooted, popularly reproduced, and, therefore, not necessarily as easy for elites to manipulate. In other words, identities are not completely fluid, as instrumentalists argue. Instead, they can be internalized, thus becoming sticky and able to influence people's behaviors and perceptions. More importantly, constructivists agree with instrumentalists that political power and not piety is the critical factor in shaping sectarian tensions in the Middle East.

Further, primordialism and instrumentalism offer over-generalized and universal interpretations. Both approaches encourage generalized statements and make little reference to cross-cultural differences or previous historical variation. They tend to universalize rather than capture the complexity of individual contexts (Dixon, 2018, p. 17). In contrast, constructivism stresses that people may have multiple identities and that the salience of one identity over others depends on time and space, i.e., context matters (Dixon, 2018). Given this discussion, what differentiates constructivists from instrumentalists is that the former perceive sectarianism as a top-down *and* a bottom-up process.

In their edited volume, *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (2017a) challenge the universal and reductionist explanations of the first two schools discussed above. The volume's authors offer a constructivist analysis to argue that context matters. They insist that close attention needs to be paid to how structure and agency shape sectarian dynamics. They call that process *sectarianization*, "a process shaped by political actors operating within specific contexts, pursuing political goals that involve popular

mobilization around particular (religious) identity markers" (p. 18). Factors such as class, fragile states, and geopolitical rivalries impact how the sectarianization process is shaped.[14]

Speaking of fragile states and geopolitical rivalries, Salloukh (2017b) argues that since the 1950s the region has become a theater for a major Saudi-Iranian geopolitical rivalry. These domestic actors mobilize sectarian identities to reverse and balance the political influence of their domestic opponents and to advance their own local political interests. For example, Saudi Arabia supported Iraq with Salafi-jihadi fighters out of fear that Iran was growing in popularity in southern Iraq and Lebanon in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. Further, Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen was also due to similar fears. To balance and reverse Iran's growing regional influence, Saudi Arabia rallied moderate Arab states, i.e., Egypt, Jordan, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain, Yemen, and UAE, to its side (Salloukh, 2017b). Iran, on the other hand, allied with Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. Consequently, the Arab Spring collapsed multiple Middle Eastern states that had pluralist societies and created a safe haven for the region's political elites to deploy their sectarian practices. In Salloukh's words, the current sectarian tensions feed on "state weakness, civil war, communal fears, and powerful media platforms, with devastating consequences for the territorial integrity and national unity of a number of Arab states" (Salloukh, 2017b, p. 65).

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia depicts Shi'a Muslims as heretics, and these views are often promoted publicly as part of the government policy. On the other hand, Iran uses a subtle strategy that consists of referring to Sunnis and the Shi'as as part of the same family, albeit from different branches. The reason that Iran avoids depicting Sunnis as heretics is because Iran

[14] In the previous chapter, I discussed how at different points in Iraq's history, each of these factors perpetuated sectarianism.

aspires to lead the Muslim world, of which Sunnis compose 85 percent. In other words, Iran emphasizes the unity between Sunnis and Shi'as and accuses imperialist and Zionist powers for sectarian conflicts (Hashemi, 2016; Hashemi & Postel, 2017b). Iran's sectarian strategy in the context of war consists of the exploitation of historic Shi'a themes of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom at the hands of Sunni political forces.

Now, I return the discussion to constructivism as the third school of thought. Valbjørn (2020) found that constructivism comes in numerous versions imported from different fields of studies. For example, Dixon (2018) is inspired by the debate on sectarianism in Northern Ireland and proposes *constructivist realism*, a perspective that stresses the constraints operating on political actors and the difficult and even tragic choices that they may face. In Dixon's words, "politicians do not stand outside of the world and are likely to be affected by the 'sectarian' and other identities and antagonisms that may be apparent among the people" (Dixon, 2018, p. 31).

Toby Dodge (Dodge, 2018a, 2020) proposes *constructivist structuralism* to stress the role of both structure and agency in the *sectarianization* process. With that, Dodge argues that people's actions are more than the outcome of obeying rules set by elites. According to him, in post-2003 Iraq, an individual's perceptions and actions are transformed by the material and ideational struggles that have dominated the country's political field. On a similar note, Raymond Hinnebusch (2020) introduces his model of *thick constructivism*, which balances sectarianism and nationalism and their interrelation with state formation in multi-sectarian states.

Another constructivist variant is offered by Adam Gaiser (2017), who challenges researchers to move away from Weber and the Western taxonomies of church vis-à-vis sect.[15]

[15] Following Michael Cook (1999), Gaiser argues that the Weberian notion is not useful when carried over into an Islamic context. For Weber and Troeltsch, sects are apolitical; however, in the Islamic context, the establishment of sects was a consequence of the religious and political developments after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. Also, membership in an Islamic sect is not voluntary, as Weber and Troeltsch believed. Furthermore, Weber's typology of

Instead, he suggests using a "narrative" approach to study sectarian identities. This is the idea of studying inter-sectarian divisions as "participatory discourses in which individuals ultimately choose to locate themselves in a plot ('emplot' themselves)—or not to do so—and which can thereby imply certain kinds of practice/behavior" (Gaiser, 2017, p. 77). Adopting this approach allows for human agency and the idea that, in addition to political elites, individuals on a micro level are also participants in the construction and the deconstruction of sectarianism.

In addition to constructivism, some scholars propose *institutionalism* as the "new savior." This is the idea that "the political importance and evolution of various kinds of collective identities depends on the nature and strength of those institutions within which politics takes place" (Valbjørn, 2020, p. 99). For example, in his analysis of the Lebanese case, Bassel Salloukh suggests that to understand sectarian identities in post-war Lebanon, one must analyze state institutions, family law, electoral institutions, and clientelist institutions (Salloukh, 2017a, 2017b; Salloukh et al., 2015). Similarly, Justin Gengler argues that the politicization of religious and ethnic identities in the Persian Gulf is not the *cause* of the political experiences of these states, but rather, it is a systemic *effect* of their particular societal and institutional characteristics as well as the external environment.

Conceptual Framework

Here, I heavily borrow from Fannar Haddad and Raymond Hinnebusch to argue that primordialism and instrumentalism ignore the more subtle forms of ethno-sectarian

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church is an organization characterized by a hierarchy of individuals. In the Islamic context, Shi'a have far more hierarchies than Sunni. Thus, only the Shi'a sect is close to Weber's typology. Finally, in the Islamic context, there is no such thing that meets the requirements for "church" against which Sunni and Shi'a separated. For these reasons, Weber's and Troeltsch's conceptualization of church-sect may not be very useful in characterizing the early Islamic intra-religious division (Gaiser, 2017). To move beyond Weber's notion of sect and sect membership, Gaiser argues that it is more informative to understand how human beings participate in religious groups and sub-groups. Thus, he suggests the "narrative" model.

manifestation, be those ethno-sectarian identities, solidarities, grievances, or discrimination and prejudice (Haddad, 2014a). The complexity of ethno-sectarian dynamics cannot be restricted to just violence or active ethno-sectarian hatred. Identities can be manifested in subtle, unintentional, and even unconscious forms of discrimination and prejudice (Davis, 2010; Haddad, 2014a). To further illuminate the dynamics of sectarianism, we cannot restrict the discussion on political actors and their exclusive role in shaping and manipulating identities. Similarly, we cannot exclude citizens and group agency from this discussion. On the contrary, citizens and ethno-sectarian communities can play a key role in constructing and deconstructing identities. Citizens can participate and implement the ethno-sectarian identity narrative, but they can also stop participating—hence, the "deconstructing" of the ethno-sectarian element of their identities (Gaiser, 2017). This implies that the masses are not naive recipients of the manipulative discourses imposed on them by the elites.

I adopt this version of constructivism that gives equal weight to structure and agency. Identities such as national and sect, as Raymond Hinnebusch notes, are not arbitrarily invented as naïve instrumentalists think, but they are constructed over a long *duree* (Smith, 1991, 1998). The mobilization of such identities is contingent upon rooted historical memories and cultural ingredients. Once these identities are constructed, they become social facts in the sense that they shape individuals' perceptions and ideas (Hinnebusch, 2020, p. 147). More importantly, these identities are affected by the modernization process through print, literacy, media, and competition over resources.

In the context of modernity, elites mobilize these identities by taking advantage of major events such as wars and revolution to instrumentalize and mobilize either inclusive identities, such as nationalism, or exclusive identities, such as sectarianism. As I discussed in the previous

chapter, the events of the 20th century indicate that modernity in the Middle East, and Iraq in particular, is associated with the spread of nationalism and the subsumption and/or overshadowing of sub-and trans-state identities, i.e., promoting the Iraqi identity at the expense of the Kurdish ethnic identity and Shiite sect identity. At the same time, modernity is associated with fostering these sub-and trans-state identities, especially sect identities, i.e., fostering sectarian identity in the post-2003 context. In such contexts, elites mobilize communal groups and instrumentalize communal cleavages to "divide and rule" (Hinnebusch, 2020, p. 144).

The debate continues among scholars concerning which approach—or a combination of them—is best to explain sectarianism in the Middle East. It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to settle this debate. However, based on the quality of arguments and evidence provided by each approach, I assert that constructivism makes the most sense for the following reasons:

1. Contexts matters. Compared to other approaches, constructivists pay close attention to each context and each location in which sectarianism emerges across the Middle East. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the surge and decline of sectarianism were dependent on a number of factors particular to each historical period of Iraq.
2. Middle Easterners have multiple identities. National, ethnic, religious, and sectarian identities are some of the important ones they self-identify with. Constructivists provide a better argument on how and why their relative importance varies across time and space. For example, how and when ethno-sectarian identities become salient, how similar or different social cleavages across societies are, and the motivations for contending groups and the strategies they use to peruse their interests.

3. Both instrumentalists and constructivists agree that these identities are not fixed and that they change over time. Further, both agree that national, regional, and international factors have an impact on how these identities are mobilized. However, constructivists provide more evidence of the ways in which these identities are internalized by the public, arguing that phenomena such as sectarianism are not "surface phenomena." Thus, constructivism proves that sectarianism is a bottom-up process as much as it is a top-down one (Matthiesen, 2013).

The findings of this study contribute to a constructivist line of research. Specifically, this study expands the discussion on the ways in which sectarianism (structured and institutionalized from the top) manifests on the individual level (on a micro-level). In this study, I call it *sectarianism on the individual level,* which I define as *the ways in which sectarianism is absorbed into the rhythms and relations that make up the everyday life of citizens*.

Sectarianism on The Individual Level

This line of research examines how citizens understand and reproduce sectarian dichotomies, imaginaries, and narratives in their everyday lives (Hafidh & Fibiger, 2019, p. 303). Some of the Iraqi and international scholars who have studied and analyzed this line of research are Ali al-Wardi (1913-1995), Said al-Samarraiy (1993), Fannar Haddad (2014a), Joanne Randa Nucho (2016), Raymond Hinnebusch (2016a, 2016b), and Thomas Fibiger (2018b). These scholars agree that political elites instrumentalize religion to achieve mundane goals using education, mass media, satellites, and social media as means to spread sectarian narratives (Ghalioun, 2012, 2017; Jasim, 2016; Sabbar, 2016). Yet, this line of research emphasizes that sectarianism is not a surface phenomenon that exists only on a macro level, but it is a bottom-up process as much as it is a top-down one (Matthiesen, 2013). A growing number of studies

conducted in the Middle East provide empirical evidence that sectarianism is encountered anywhere from state bureaucracy to neighborhoods, schools, work, restaurants, local gossip, and social media (see Deeb, 2018; Fibiger, 2018b; Nucho, 2016; Rouhana, 2015).

The pioneering Iraqi sociologist, A li al-Wardi (1913-1995), explains that sectarianism transcends the religious dimension and roots itself in prevailing socio-political conditions (al-Zurfi, 2014, p. 519). Al-Wardi insists that when people are sectarian, they do not care about the ethical and spiritual principles of their sect. Conversely, they care about the loyalty to fellow members of their sect and enmity towards other sects (Al-Wardi, 2007). Given this premise, al-Wardi argues that Iraqis are born into a system that structurally divides people based on sectarian differences. People's sectarian attitudes and behaviors are, thus, shaped by the sectarian social structure.

Al-Samarraiy (1993) argues that sectarianism is passed on from one generation to another through everyday social interactions. State institutions such as education and mass media perpetuate sectarianism by teaching and spreading stereotypical and discriminatory narratives about a specific sect. Additionally, family members, friends, and neighbors pass on these narratives to the younger generations through everyday activities and interactions. Furthermore, al-Samarraiy (1993) argues that in Iraq people tend to hide their sectarian tendencies when they are in the public sphere and tend to uncover them in private spheres. This way, sectarian individuals could be people living in the same neighborhood, dressing the same way, working at the same place, and smiling at others at social and religious gatherings. Nevertheless, they may still detest each other (al-Samarraiy, 1993, pp. 45–46).

As al-Samarraiy pointed out, due to its perceived negativity, people in Iraq tend to avoid publicly talking about sectarianism for fear of coming across as sectarian. Haddad (2014a)

highlights that in post-2003 Iraq, the taboos surrounding the topic of sectarianism may have been weakened, yet people still refrain from being publicly sectarian. When the Sunnis and the Shiites refer to each other, they tend to avoid the words such as "Sunni" and "Shiite." Instead, they opt for other options such as "*ikhwanuna al-Sunna* [our Sunni brothers]," "*ikhwanuna al-Shi3'a* [our Shiite brothers]," "those of the other sect," or "a certain component of our people" (Haddad, 2014, p. 208).[16]

Haddad (2014a), Fibiger (2018b), and Hinnebusch (2019) theorize that sectarianism varies along a continuum of intensity from aggressive to assertive to passive to banal. On the one hand, assertive sectarianism refers to expressing sectarian identities and symbols without the intention to offend, attack, or disapprove of the other sect. For example, the Shiites display Shia saints without attacking or intending to offend the Sunnis (Haddad, 2014, p. 26). If these conditions are not met, then, sectarianism becomes aggressive (physical or verbal). On the other hand, passive sectarianism indicates the display of sectarian identities only when the occasion calls for it; otherwise, it entails discomfort in expressing it. If the display of sectarian identities is done unconsciously, then it falls under the category of banal sectarianism (Hinnebusch, 2016a). The closest parallel that comes to mind concerning this discussion is Allport's scale of prejudice and discrimination, which measures five stages of prejudice and discrimination that increase with the intensity of harm produced (Allport, 1954). The stages, in ascending order, include *verbal antagonism*, *avoidance and isolation*, *overt and covert discrimination*, *physical attack*, and *extermination*.

[16] Extremists, however, don't hesitate to use expressions that hold negative and derogatory meanings in the Iraqi imaginary.

Haddad highlights that during periods of high sectarian tensions, Iraqis—not all of them, but those who "subscribe to a sectarian identity"—are more prone to be aggressively and assertively sectarian. Otherwise, during default circumstances, Iraqis are more prone to be passively or banally sectarian. Social psychological theories of intergroup relations would support this analysis. These theories would agree that during times of conflict, group identities become salient in the hierarchy. Thus, biases, stereotypes, and discrimination escalate. Conversely, during peaceful circumstances, group identities become less salient and intergroup relations improve (Sherif, 1966; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

With that being said, the continuum of the intensity of sectarianism proposed by Haddad needs further empirical research. First, there are not yet instruments in the literature that measure this continuum in all its complexity. Second, there is a particular lack of interest in developing quantitative research tools (e.g., surveys and scales) to measure and assess sectarianism, including Haddad's proposal (I discuss this point in more detail in chapter 4). Third, scholars who agree with Haddad do not discuss whether aggressive and assertive sectarianism exists during peaceful periods, and if so, why it does. Similarly, they do not discuss whether passive and banal sectarianism exists during conflict periods, and if so, why. Finally, it is unclear whether passive and banal sectarianism produce prejudice and discrimination.

Synthesis: Sectarian Discrimination

Borrowing from Western sociological scholarship on discrimination, we learn that discrimination is the unequal treatment of persons who belong to a different group (Allport, 1954; Pager & Shepherd, 2008). We also learn that discrimination manifests in various forms and levels that range from overt to covert at both the personal and institutional levels (Allport, 1954; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Feagin, 1991). To illustrate, overt discrimination refers to blatant

antipathy toward another group, believing in their inferiority and endorsing pejorative stereotypes of them (Cortina, 2008, p. 59). Covert discrimination—also known as *microaggression*—refers to everyday brief verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual exchanges that send denigrating messages to the targeted group (Sue et al., 2007). It is worth mentioning that covert discrimination is harder to identify than overt discrimination due to the former's subtle, indirect, and ambiguous nature (Pierce, 1969).

Borrowing from the literature on sectarianism in the Middle East, we learn that sectarianism is the politicization of religious differences by political elites to achieve mundane goals. We also learn that sectarianism manifests in various forms that range from aggressive to covert at both personal and institutional levels. To synthesize, sectarian discrimination can be defined as *blatant antipathy towards other sects, believing in their inferiority, and endorsing pejorative stereotypes of them. Further, sectarian discrimination can be manifested directly and blatantly, or indirectly and covertly.*

Partisan and Sect-Affiliated Media

As I discussed above, in the context of modernity, elites use literacy, print, and media to mobilize sectarian identities. In fact, after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab Spring in 2011, sect-affiliated and sect-funded media outlets rapidly spread across the Middle East (Lynch, 2016b; Wehrey, 2016). Indeed, Iraq experienced a rapid growth of private and partisan satellites funded by sectarian political groups to promote their agendas flavored with sectarian lines. Besides, extremist narratives and angry religious ceremonies in response to horrific sectarian conflicts received disproportionate coverage by TV and social media outlets (such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter). This trans-state transmission of sectarianism has arguably contributed to polarizing communities and intensifying identity conflicts.

Sectarian Self-Identification

Bishara (2018a) points out that sectarianism is a fanatical belonging to a sect that is united by a creed. More importantly, members of the group may not necessarily consciously believe in the creed or practice its commandments. Belonging, in this case, functions as the determinant of the individual's self-identity and his/her attitudes towards those who belong to a different sect. Further, within the framework of sectarianism, affiliation to the sect prevails over affiliation to a religion. This goes against the principles of Islam and the idea that belonging to the Muslim *umma* [community] should prevail over belonging to subgroups such as sects.

Religiosity: Islam and Sectarianism

One of the most significant misconceptions about sectarianism in the Middle East is that religion—in this case, Islam—is the critical factor that shapes sectarian tensions in the region. Thankfully, instrumentalists and constructivists have tentatively proved that this is inaccurate and oversimplistic. To start, it is necessary to distinguish between religion and religiosity. Religion is a set of rules, messages, and teachings, whereas religiosity is the ways in which people understand, interpret, and practice them (al-Najar, 1989; Bishara, 2012; Y. Zeidan, 2013). People understand, interpret, and practice religion in various and sometimes contradicting ways.

In his insightful book, *Between Muslims*, Andrew Bush (2020) states that

> Many Muslims aspire to be the best Muslims they can be, and they seek to live out Islam in the best ways they can. Yet many forgo the efforts to become pious Muslims. *In doing so, they do not cease to be Muslims*. Some may suppose that these Muslims are therefore secular rather than religious. But that opposition fails to describe their religious orientations. (p. 1)

Bush emphasizes that Muslims' relationships with religion and the Islamic tradition are complex. Studies of Islam in anthropology, religion, and history demonstrate that piety in Islam is not a single thing, but rather a moral aspiration that varies in different contexts. Muslims carry out

piety in their everyday lives in relation to a range of social and material factors. Yet, some turn away from piety and nonetheless self-identify as Muslims. The findings of this study support Bush's argument, as some of my respondents stated that they do not practice religious rituals but still self-identified as Muslims (see chapter 6).

To get back to the discussion on Islam and sectarianism al-Wardi argues that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire had transformed Islam in Iraq from a religion of social justice into one of corrupted institutions that protected the personal interests of politicians. Al-Wardi is specifically critical of a corrupted class of religious scholars who he accuses of supporting oppressive regimes to protect their interests. In contemporary Iraq, both politicians and this class of corrupted religious scholars "see the excellence in sectarian, national, or tribal fanaticism and in their opinion excellence is defending the sect, right or wrong" (Al-Wardi, 1994, p. 296). These principles go against the real tenets of Islam, which are mercy, social justice, and equality for all regardless of class, sect, tribe, or nationality.

More interestingly, Iraqi scholars have observed that during the twentieth century, there were times when religiosity among Iraqis grew weaker; nevertheless, sectarianism remained salient (Al-Wardi, 1995, p. 260). Even today, it is no surprise to see secular Iraqis who are sectarian or religious Iraqis who are not sectarian. Again, this emphasizes the point that sectarianism and Islam are not necessarily associated. In addition to scholars and philosophers, some prominent Iraqi religious figures agree on that point. For example, in his book *Sectarianism from Islam's Perspective*, Mohammed Sadiq al-Saddir—a prominent Iraqi Shiite cleric—explains that there are different sects in Islam and that some Muslims self-identify with one of them. For al-Saddir, a sect refers to a group of Muslims who believe and practice a specific doctrine. Regardless of doctrinal differences, Islam preaches for the unity of all Muslims

under the name of one *umma* [community]. To support his argument, al-Sadir cites a Quranic verse: “indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” (Quran 2:4-5, Oxford World's Classics edition). Al-Sadir also refers to the *hadith* [the sayings and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed], which states that the superiority of one Muslim over another is measured only by *taqwa* [piety], and not by practicing a specific doctrine. Al-Sadir insists that sectarian conflicts do not concern differences in creeds and doctrines practiced by Sunnis and Shiites; instead, they are purely political. He blames greed as the main force causing Muslims in Iraq and other parts of the Arab world to fight each other.

Conclusion

A thorough survey of the literature on sectarianism in the Middle East reveals that scholars take three positions: (1) flatly reject primordialism and instrumentalism and propose a third alternative approach, (2) acknowledge that the pure versions of these schools still offer interesting and diverse answers; nevertheless, they need an upgrade and an update (see for example Gause, 2014; Osman, 2014), and (3) combine a variety of approaches and theories, arguing that no approach alone is sufficient to examine a complex phenomenon such as sectarianism (see for example Cammett, 2019; Hinnebusch, 2016b; Valbjørn, 2018).

In this study, I take a constructivist approach to explore sectarian attitudes and behaviors on the individual level. The findings of this study will contribute to the line of research that focuses on the ways in which sectarianism is absorbed into people’s rhythms and relations that make up their everyday lives. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodologies and methods of this study.

CHAPTER 4 : METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter is currently being revised and re-submitted in the journal Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this mixed-method study. This study takes a pragmatist perspective and uses explanatory sequential design (see Creswell & Clark, 2011) to investigate sectarian discrimination between Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites. I start by briefly discussing the distinctions among methodology, method, and design. I then discuss mixed-methods research and present the main types of mixed-method designs used in the social sciences. Then, I present methodological approaches used in sectarianism research and discuss my critique of those approaches.[17] Finally, I present the explanatory sequential design used in this study.

Methodologies in Social Science

Creswell (2014) points out that the three main components of research are paradigms—also known as philosophical worldviews—research designs, and specific methods and procedures to collect and analyze the data. Below, I will discuss each of these components.

Paradigms, methods, and designs

Thomas Kuhn (1970) introduced the concept of paradigm, which refers to the scientific framework within which the researcher designs basic assumptions, specific research questions, and research techniques to be used. Kuhn (1970) and Guba (1990) note that each community of researchers share a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions related to conducting scientific research. Based on that, each community adopts one or more paradigms to conduct research.

[17] I use the term sectarianism research to refer to the scholarly work done on sectarianism in the Middle East and not in Europe. There is a large and separate literature on sectarianism in Europe that is not discussed or referred to in this chapter.

Chalmers (1999) defines a paradigm as something "made up of the general theoretical assumptions and laws, and techniques for their application that the members of a particular scientific community adopt" (p. 108). Creswell (2014) uses the term *worldview* as a synonym of paradigm, and he describes it as "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (p. 36). It is worth noting that in the social sciences, there are several competing paradigms (Willis, 2007, p. 8). Their exact number and names vary from author to author, but some of the main ones are post-positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and pragmatism (Neuman, 2013).

On the one hand and at the risk of oversimplification, Neuman (2013) argues that in post-positivism,[18] the researcher uses deductive logic to collect data by using experiments, surveys, and statistics to objectively test causal laws. On the other hand, interpretivism—also known as constructivism—uses an inductive logic to collect data by using participant observation, field research, and content analysis, ultimately to understand and interpret how people construct and maintain their social worlds. According to Neuman, the two most postpositivist disciplines in the social sciences are economy and experimental psychology, whereas anthropology and history are the least. Sociology, however, lies somewhere in between.

Often, post-positivism is associated with quantitative methods, objectivity, standardization, and deductive reasoning. Creswell (2014) argues that post-positivists produce knowledge by carefully and objectively observing and measuring the reality of our world. Also, according to post-positivists, the laws that govern the world need to be tested, verified, and

[18] Willis et al. (2007) argues that there are differences between positivism and post-positivism; however, these differences are less important than the similarities (p. 12). For example, post-positivism challenges positivists' notions about the absolute truth of knowledge. Post-positivists recognize that we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behavior and actions of humans (Creswell, 2014, p. 36).

refined. Thus, research begins with a theory, which then leads to data collection that either supports or refutes that theory. The research concludes with making necessary revisions and conducting additional tests (Creswell, 2014, p. 7). In contradistinction, interpretivism is often associated with qualitative methods, subjectivity, standardization, and inductive reasoning. Interpretivism is sensitive to context and to the ways in which others see the world. This approach aims to achieve an empathetic understanding rather than testing laws and quantifying human behaviors (Neuman, 2013, p. 109).

An opposition between post-positivism and interpretivism has always existed and has resulted in the development of separate sets of research approaches, methods, and designs. Here, by research approaches, I refer to quantitative and qualitative approaches or a mix of both. And by research methods, I refer to the specific procedures and techniques used to collect, analyze, interpret, and validate the data. Finally, by research designs, I refer to the set of methods used in collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and validating data: for example, experiments, ethnographies, explanatory sequential designs, and exploratory sequential designs.

The third main type of paradigm is critical theory, the primary concern of which is not only to study the society but also to change it through uncovering the existing multiple layers of social reality, and criticizing and transforming the underlying sources of social control, power relations, and inequality (Neuman, 2013, pp. 110–111). This approach uses abduction—an approach in which different alternative frameworks are applied to data and theory—to create an explanatory critique (Neuman, 2013, p. 114). Often, critical theory is associated with community action groups, political organizations, and social movements rather than with academic researchers. What differentiates critical theorists from others is that they may use similar research techniques but a different approach to the research problem, to the questions they ask,

and to the purpose of their research. Critical theorists use a *reflexive-dialectic orientation* in which subjective and objective sides are integrated to make observations, reflect on them, and take social-political actions to improve people's lives, because critical theorists aim to transform the reality that people live in (Guba, 1990; Neuman, 2013).

Finally, the fourth main type of paradigm used by social science researchers is pragmatism. Some of the founding fathers of pragmatism are Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Chauncey Wright. And scholars like John Dewey, Herbert Mead, and Arthur F. Bentley further developed this philosophical movement that was created as a reaction to the traditional assumptions about social science inquiry and the idea that it (social science inquiry) can be accessed solely by using a single scientific method (Maxcy, 2003). Pragmatists emphasize that there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry. The researcher is not subjected to the constraints imposed by the forced choice dichotomy between post-positivism and interpretivism; rather, the researcher is free to use different research methods and techniques (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Thus, pragmatists jointly reject either-or post-positivism and interpretivism, instead embracing both worldviews and valuing both subjective and objective knowledge. Kaushik and Walsh (2019) argue that pragmatism "is situated somewhere in the center of the paradigm continuum in terms of mode of inquiry" (p. 6). Therefore, if post-positivists use quantitative methods and deductive reasoning and interpretivists use qualitative methods and inductive reasoning, pragmatists embrace both extremes and offer a flexible and more reflexive approach to research design. That is to say that pragmatism as a paradigm is concerned with what works to solve the problem rather than with antecedent conditions such as in post-positivism. This allows the researcher to combine the different strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Scholars such as Morgan (2014), Patton (2002), and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) embrace pragmatism as a paradigm for mixed-method research. Creswell (2014) argues that each method has its biases and weaknesses; thus, collecting data by using mixed methods neutralizes the weaknesses of each form of data. However, for pragmatists, using different methods and taking advantage of their different strengths is not enough; the researcher also needs to have a plan for integrating the results of different forms of data (Morgan, 2014, p. 41). In any event, it is important to note that pragmatism neither requires nor excludes specific methods or a combination of them (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Yvonne Feilzer, 2010). The best method is the one that most effectively produces knowledge.

The scientific community often engages in the debate over what paradigm and what method should be used in research for it to be considered research. There are still instances in which researchers hold assumptions about other paradigms and methods and refuse to accept different viewpoints and perspectives than their own. Willis et al. (2007) mention some incidents they witnessed in academia in which established scholars refused research proposals because of the specific paradigm used. This reminded me of a thematic conversation session on sectarianism I attended a few years ago at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting. During that session, another Ph.D. student and I expressed our interest in developing quantitative tools to measure sectarian discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes. An established senior historian, who was one of the panelists on that session, politely smiled and said, "you cannot quantify something like sectarianism. Numbers do not capture something as complex as sectarianism." It seemed that this historian viewed sectarianism from a *monomethod*[19] perspective. In

[19] Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) define monomethod as the studies that are conducted exclusively within one predominant paradigm. These studies are divided into purely qualitative or purely quantitative.

disagreement with their stance, I argue that we can gain insight from the experiences of other fields such as race and ethnicity. The scholarship on race and ethnicity has developed sophisticated methods to quantify attitudes and behaviors like racism and discrimination. If social and behavioral sciences were able to quantify ethnic and racial discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping, we should be able to quantify these behaviors and attitudes motivated by sectarianism.

Several scholars that I reviewed in this chapter rightly note that the debates over the best paradigm and method are simply a waste of time and energy. Fortunately, over the past decades, alternative paradigms, specifically mixed methods, have become more popular in research circles. Scholars and academics have realized that accepting different viewpoints and engaging in discussion—instead of rejecting them—with others who operate within different paradigms is the best way to stimulate discourse and expand our understanding of important social issues. Willis et al. (2007) insist that " there is no legitimate way of asserting with absolute confidence that one paradigm is better than another" (p. 21). Therefore, scholars are encouraged to be more willing to listen and engage in discussion (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Mixed Methods Research and Design

Pragmatism is viewed as an appropriate philosophical paradigm for mixed-method research (Maxwell, 2011, p. 27).[20] An early definition of mixed methods is provided by Greene, Garacelli, and Graham (1989), who state that mixed-method research is a study that includes "at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method

[20] See (Creswell & Clark, 2007) for other paradigms identified in mixed-method studies such as the transformative emancipatory paradigm and the critical realist perspective.

(designed to collect words), where neither type of method is inherently linked to any particular inquiry paradigm" (p. 256). For Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), mixed method is research in which data are collected and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative approaches, and findings are then integrated and inferences are drawn. Following Tashakkori and Teddlie's definition, mixed-method research is more than just mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches; it is a whole separate methodological orientation with its own worldview, vocabulary, and techniques (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. x). Further, the combination of methods could occur in a single study or a multi-phased study.

When do researchers need to use mixed-method designs? Greene (2007) points out that social phenomena are extraordinarily complex. A better understanding of such social phenomena can be obtained by using multiple approaches and ways of knowing, because using one approach to social inquiry is inevitably partial (Greene, 2007, p. 20). On the other hand, Creswell (2007) argues that it depends on the type of problem being studied. For example, if a researcher needs to test a theory, then a quantitative approach is best, whereas in a case in which the subject of inquiry has not been explored and understood because little research has been done on it, then a qualitative approach is best (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 50).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) identified nearly forty different types of mixed-method designs in the literature across disciplines. Creswell and Clark (2011) narrow them down to the following six major designs: (1) *the convergent parallel* design, used when the utilization of only one approach is insufficient to explore and understand the research problem; (2) *the explanatory sequential design*, used when there is a need to further explain initial results and a second database is used to better explain the first one (for example, research may begin with a survey distributed on a large sample to test a number of hypotheses and then followed up with a number

of interviews with respondents to better understand certain findings from that survey); (3) *the exploratory sequential design*, used when there is a need to generalize exploratory findings (in such cases, the researcher does not know what questions need to be asked and what variables need to be measured or what theories can guide the study; thus, it is ideal for the researcher to start with a qualitative approach to explore, followed by a quantitative approach); (4) *the embedded design*, used when there is a need to enhance a study with a second method, especially in ground theory or case study—the researcher may embed or nest a second method to the primary method; (5) *the transformative design* in which one of the first four designs mentioned above are used but within a transformative framework that would bring change to the social issue being studied; (6) *the multi-phase* or *multiple-project design,* used when there is a need to understand a research objective through multiple research phases that span several years.

Mixed-method research is subject to considerations and constraints just as any other research method or design. One of the major challenges that researchers face when they use explanatory sequential design is the interpretation of the two datasets. Scholars argue that the simple comparison of the two datasets is inadequate because sample sizes are not the same (Creswell & Clark, 2011; David L. Morgan, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For example, if a study starts with a quantitative phase during which a large dataset, representative of the population, is collected and then followed by a limited number of focus groups or in-depth interviews, the results of the second dataset cannot be generalized to the population compared to the first dataset. Given the fact that the sample size of both datasets is different, additional validity and reliability concerns arise. Also, this design presents challenges for identifying cases from the quantitative results to be further explored in the follow-up qualitative phase. For example, considering which cases the researcher needs to select and why, the selection of

significant, non-significant, outliers, or new themes, the rationale behind that decision, and the careful justification of those steps.

Methodologies and Methods in Sectarianism Research

Research on sectarianism draws theories and methods from different disciplines, i.e., Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, International Relations, History, Islamic Studies, and Middle East Studies. Sectarianism as a topic is relatively new in the study of Middle East politics, having gained popularity in politics, media, and academia after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab Spring in the 2010s (Matthiesen, 2014). Within the field, different methodologies and approaches are used, which I discuss below.

Qualitative Approaches

Regardless of the discipline, qualitative research is predominant in sectarianism research. This type of research tends to use an interpretivist worldview and conduct the study using a variety of qualitative methods. In these studies, the relationship between theory and research is inductive whereby theory is generated out of the research and not the other way around. In quantitative studies, theory generates a research question, which in turn drives data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 384).

Further, qualitative research is concerned with words rather than numbers, and it examines the social world through participants' interpretation of that word. Morgan (2014) points out that qualitative research consists of integrating inductive, subjective, and contextual approaches. This type of research aims to provide a holistic understanding of specific and well-chosen settings. The goal is to observe behaviors in naturalistic settings and collect as much data as possible on all the factors that influence the research topic. Therefore, one of the strengths of

qualitative research is that it generates a large amount of data on a small number of people in a specific context.

Qualitative researchers use a variety of methods such as ethnography—also knowns as participant observation—interviews, focus groups, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, as well as the collection and analysis of texts and documents. These methods could be used separately or together; however, multiple methods are often used in a single study. For example, researchers who use participant observation frequently use interviews and collect and analyze texts and documents.

Qualitative research produced by the different disciplines mentioned above has significantly contributed to research on sectarianism. To mention a few examples, Dawisha (2009) uses political history to examine the political development of Iraq from its inception in 1921 to the post-2003 period. Dawisha traces history to demonstrate that the state's weak institutions, frailty of democratic attitudes and commitments, and lack of a coherent national identity hindered the process of unifying Iraq's ethnically and religiosity diverse society. On a similar note, in his book *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*, Toby Matthiesesn (2013) mixes historical development with personal observation and case studies. Through his fieldwork, he offers first-hand accounts of events in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait to examine the social movement within the Arab world and the effect of sectarianism and sectarian divisions on the Arab Spring. In his other book, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent, and Sectarianism*, Matthiesesn (2014) uses a historically grounded approach to examine the difficult experience of Shia in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia from the nineteenth century to the present day. Matthiesesn combines Arabic sources with extensive fieldwork and in-depth interviews to cast light on Shia's political mobilization in Saudi Arabia

and how sectarian discrimination has strengthened Shia communal identities. Corboz (2019) uses the official biographies of 14 religious scholars written in Arabic to explores the scholarly credentials of the contemporary *marjaʿ* in contemporary Iraq Shi'ism. Further, Fanar Haddad (2014a) used personal observation, interviews, and popular culture in the form of poetry and music in his book, *Sectarianism in Iraq, Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, to analyze sectarian relations and politicized sectarianism in Iraq.

Among multiple existing qualitative methods, ethnography remains the most used design in sectarianism research. For example, Joanne Randa Nucho's book, *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon*, examines the ways in which sectarianism is manufactured by state institutions through the channeling of services and infrastructures—such as electricity and healthcare—along sectarian lines (Nucho, 2016). She achieves that through observation and in-depth interviews with NGOs, local government, and political parties in a predominantly Armenian Suburb in northeast Beirut.

A large amount of ethnographic work on sectarianism has been published in Europe such as the following: Thomas Fibiger's work in Bahrain and Kuwait (Fibiger, 2018a, 2020; Hafidh & Fibiger, 2019); Diana Zeidan's work in Lebanon (D. Zeidan, 2017); Hussein Abou Saleh's work in Syria (2017); Simon Mabon's extensive work across the Middle East (Mabon, 2019b, 2020b; Mabon & Royle, 2017); Mara Leichtman's (Leichtman, 2015) ethnographic work in Senegal that explores the Shi'i Muslim Lebanese migrants in Senegal and Senegalese converts to Shi'i Islam; and, of course, the work of Toby Matthiesesn mentioned earlier.

After all, qualitative research raises some concerns over external and internal reliability and validity. External reliability refers to the degree to which qualitative research can be replicated. Scholars are concerned about the impossibility of replicating a study in the same

social setting of the initial study (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, concerns are raised over internal reliability and the idea that if more than one researcher conducts a study, what is the extent to which all researchers involved agree on what they observe? As far as external and internal validity, the latter involves establishing that the concepts developed from the researcher's observations are credible and believable, whereas the former involves generalizing the findings across different social settings. Internal validity constitutes a problem for qualitative research because it relies on small samples and very specific social settings.

All things considered, no research methodology or method is flawless, and it is important to acknowledge that each method or design offers important insights, so we should not discredit their contributions. The qualitative research on sectarianism reviewed above provides us with valuable and rich empirical data on specific Middle Eastern countries and contexts. More importantly, because the topic of sectarianism is relatively new, the contributions of the existing qualitative research are important because they generate rich content and preliminary data for future research.

Quantitative and Mixed-Methods Approaches

As mentioned above, quantitative research reflects a postpositivist worldview. This paradigm assumes that causes determine effects/outcomes (Creswell, 2014). The researcher reduces the research idea into a set of variables and hypotheses to be tested. The research begins with a hypothesis—often developed from the literature—then data are collected, which either support or refute the hypothesis. The knowledge developed from the research helps to make necessary revisions for additional future tests. This postpositivist position stems from the idea that the absolute truth can never be found; thus, evidence gathered from research is imperfect and fallible (Creswell, 2014, p. 36). Accordingly, in quantitative research, hypotheses are not proven,

but rather tested to see whether they data supports or rejects them. Further, being objective is an important aspect of quantitative research; thus, standards of validity and reliability are closely examined.

Some of the main quantitative research designs originated in studies of psychology, such as *true experiments*, *quasi-experiments*, *applied behavioral analysis*, or *single-subject experiments*. In experimental research, the researcher investigates whether a specific treatment affects the outcome by providing the treatment to a group and withholding it from another. Other non-experimental designs include *causal-comparative research* in which the researcher compares an independent variable across two or more groups and *correlational designs* in which the researcher investigates the degree to which two or more variables are associated. Non-experimental designs are popular in disciplines other than psychology, such as sociology and political science.

While qualitative approaches in the study of sectarianism in the Middle East predominate the field, a limited but growing number of such studies exist. A cursory survey of the literature reveals that these studies are mainly conducted by political scientists and international relations scholars. To mention a few examples, Gengler (2019) combines interviews with a nationally representative public opinion survey to explain variation in sectarian resilience observed in Bahrain during and after the protests of 2011. Sigel and Badaan (2020) used a nationally representative survey experiment across the Arab Twittersphere in Lebanon to evaluate what types of counter-speech interventions are most effective in reducing sectarian hate speech online. Similarly, Shockley and Gengler (2020) used a survey experiment to explain co-ethnic and co-sectarian voting behavior in Qatar. Finally, Mousa (2020) conducted an experiment in which she randomly assigned Iraqi Christians displaced by ISIS to either an all-

Christian soccer team or a team mixed with Muslims, and then she used a survey to investigate the extent to which intergroup contact can build social cohesion among teammates.

A Critique of the Methodologies in Sectarianism Research

Davis (2008) argues that the research on sectarianism does not suffer from a lack of empirical data. Davis' argument is partially true; we do have some data, but these data are predominantly qualitative, which means that what we have is predominantly the product of a single perspective. I argue that it gives a narrow view that does not fully reflect the multifaceted and multilayered nature of the social and organizational reality of the Middle East.[21]

If we compare quantitative and mixed methods in sectarianism research to other fields, we notice that there are fewer data, and if available, quality, quantity, and statistical methods are simple and descriptive. For example, in fields such as sociology, standards of scientific rigor are high thanks to the large and detailed datasets and complex statistical methods developed over time (Raftery, 2001). As a researcher interested in quantitative approaches, I cannot stress enough the importance of having accurate statistics and methodologies concerning the complex patterns of sectarianism in the Middle East. Instead of having one exclusive and partial view developed by one single approach, I advocate for the application of multiple methods, theories, and philosophical approaches. This will not only help us develop a theory of sectarianism but will also offer us a better and more accurate assessment of this phenomenon.

To clarify, sectarianism research does not suffer from methodological monism or having only one paradigm that dominates the field. The field is interdisciplinarity, the methodologies adopted are plural, and fellows from different disciplines are adopting a variety of approaches to

[21] The field also suffers from a poverty of theoretical and conceptual frameworks through which sectarianism is studied (see Valbjørn, 2020). This is extensively discussed in chapter 3.

contribute to the field. However, hypothesis testing, and quantitative analysis still face several hurdles. This has resulted in the dominance of qualitative approaches over all others.

Now, what are some of the challenges that quantitative researchers face? First, sectarianism research newer than other established fields and building high standards of scientific rigor takes time. Second, due to conflicts and security measures, access to the population in the Middle East is sometimes difficult if not impossible, which makes the process of data collection psychologically and economically exorbitant. Third, in other established disciplines, countless major institutions have centers and initiatives that focus on quantitative social science methodology and provide data and resources for quantitative researchers (Raftery, 2001). There are only a limited number of such institutions and centers that focus on quantitative social science methodology in the Middle East. Optimistically, their numbers are growing, but there is still a lot of room for improvement. Fourth, due to political unrest, holding census classifications, national surveys, or any type of large high-quality survey sample dataset collected with public funds and made publicly available to researchers is still scarce in the Middle East.

Notwithstanding, there are a couple of publicly available large datasets that explore people's values and beliefs in the Middle East., such as the following: (1) World Values Survey (WVS), which started covering some Middle Eastern countries—Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia—in their fourth wave collected between 1999-1994. In the fifth wave (2005-2009), Egypt, Iran, and Iraq, and later in the sixth wave (2010-2014), Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Qatar, and Yemen were added respectively. (2) Arab Barometer (AB) survey data. Again, due to political unrest, AB does not cover all countries across all waves. For example, in the first (2006-2009) and fourth wave (2016-2017), Iraq was not surveyed due to wars and

conflicts that swept the country. (3) On a smaller scale, recently the USIP, in collaboration with the nonprofit research organization Research Inquiry, has made public their Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework (CSMF) dataset. Since September 2018, CSMF has collected three waves of data across conflict-affected communities in Mosul, Iraq to investigate community security, rule of law, governance, and livelihood in communities heavily affected by the war against ISIS. In addition to these datasets, there are a few other large data that are not publicly available, such as the Arab Opinion Index (AOI), collected by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the Gallup World Poll, and the Arab Youth Survey.

These data sets provide nuanced insights that can inform the changing beliefs, attitudes, and values of ordinary citizens across the Middle East. For example, Alijla (2016) used AB survey data to explore the influence of institutional conditions on the level of generalized trust in Lebanon. Tessler (2010) also used AB survey data to investigate the nature and determinants of attitudes toward the political role of Islam held by ordinary citizens in Jordan, Palestine, Alegria, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Yemen. Al-Masri (2017) used the AOI data set to investigate Arabs' attitudes towards ISIS. Finally, Spierings (2019) used both the AB survey data and the WVS to provide unique empirical insights into the multifaceted impact of religiosity on social tolerance in the MENA region.

Notwithstanding, a cursory review of the questionnaires of these data sets reveals that they lack scientifically rigorous instruments to measure and assess important aspects of sectarianism such as discrimination, perceived discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and ethnic-sectarian identities. Again, if we compare sectarianism research to other fields such as sociology, we notice that there are rigorous instruments for each of the phenomena mentioned. Further, these instruments have been tested and re-tested countless times and across different contexts.

Here are some examples: the Perceived Racism Scale (PRS), which consists of 51 items that measure the multidimensional experience of White racism as perceived by African American adults; the Perceptions of Racism Scale (TPRS), a 20-items instrument that measures African American adults' lifetime experience of racism; the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire (PEDQ), a 22-item instrument designed to measure the frequency of various acts of ethnic discrimination in all ethnicities; the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire Community Version (PEDQ-CV), originally a 70-item questionnaire that measures multiple dimensions of everyday racism and lifetime experiences of ethnic discrimination to assess perceived racial or ethnic discrimination (the brief version of this instrument consists of 17 items) (see Atkins, 2014). Further, McConahay (1986) established the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) to measure subtle and indirect racism. More recently, Brian and Miller (2017) developed the Perceived Online Racism Scale (PORS) to assess perceived online racist interpersonal interactions and exposure to online racist content among People of Color.

It is essential that we develop similar instruments and statistical tools that are appropriate to the context of the Middle East to better assess the dynamics of sectarianism. For example, Middle Eastern and Iraqi scholars agree that political elites use education, mass media, satellites, and social media as means to spread sectarian hatred (Ghalioun, 2012, 2017; Jasim, 2016; Sabbar, 2016). How can we develop quantitative instruments to assess each one of these domains and the ways in which they are sectarianized? As another example, Haddad (2014a), Fibiger (2018b), and Hinnebusch (2019) theorize that sectarianism varies along a continuum of intensity from aggressive to assertive to passive to banal. How can we test these theories quantitatively? Learning from fellows in other disciplines, we can develop sophisticated quantitative instruments

through a multistage process involving a comprehensive literature review, focus groups, qualitative data collection, surveys, and questionnaires.

Methodology and methods of this Dissertation

To address the research questions of this study, I take a pragmatist approach and use an explanatory sequential mixed method design, also known as a qualitative follow-up approach (Morgan, 1998). My design involves doing a quantitative analysis using wave II of the AB dataset collected in 2012. The reason behind selecting this wave among others is because it is the most expansive one in terms of questions asked on discrimination and ethnic and sectarian identities. Due to funding and security concerns, the AB surveys covered Iraq in their second, third, and fifth waves only. More importantly not all questions are asked across all waves. I discuss this further in chapter 5.

I conclude the chapter by addressing the limitations of the AB data and reasoning behind doing a follow-up qualitative analysis.

Explanatory sequential design

This design starts with a quantitative approach that heavily relies on deductive testing of hypotheses developed from prior theory and the assessment of specific variables identified to test these hypotheses. Often, this design is followed up by a qualitative approach to further explain significant, nonsignificant, outliers, or surprising results generated from the quantitative approach (Bradley et al., 2009; Morse, 1991). Creswell and Clark (2011) point out that the researcher chooses this design when new questions are developed from the quantitative results and these questions cannot be answered with that data or when the researcher identifies specific quantitative results that need further explanation. The researcher then develops/refines qualitative research questions for a follow-up. The final step of this design consists of

interpreting both datasets, but, more importantly, integrating them. The rationale for this approach is that qualitative data plays a supportive role in explaining and elaborating on the quantitative data.

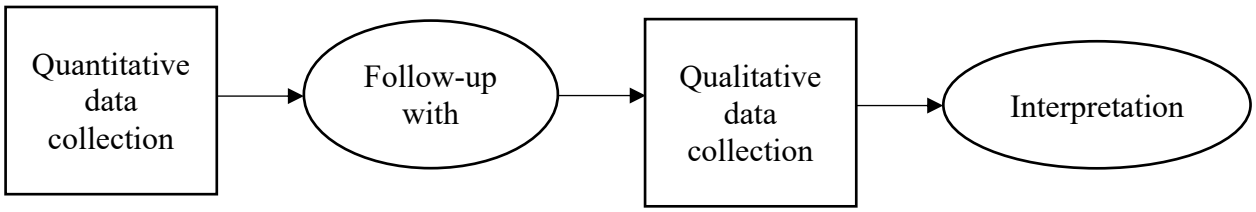

Figure 4.1 Explanatory Sequential Design. Source: (Creswell & Clark, 2011)

Morgan (2014) argues that the value of conducting a qualitative follow-up method is that the researcher can use an inductive approach to explore the sources of the results generated from the quantitative approach and generate new hypotheses that go beyond what is measured in the first phase of the study. Further, it helps the researcher better examine respondents' subjective interpretation and perspective.

In the first phase of my study, I use the AB (Wave II) to answer questions #1-4 (see Figure 1.1). These questions are developed from prior literature and theory. In the second phase, I answer questions #5-7 developed from the first phase, and the questions are: how have sectarian views changed in Iraq since 2012? do Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites perceive sectarian discrimination? how has self-identify with a sect changed since 2012. Accordingly, in chapter 5, I extensively discuss the quantitative data set, the methods, the procedures, and the results. In chapter 6, I extensively discuss the qualitative data, the methods, the sample, and the results. Finally, in chapter 7, I integrate both datasets and discuss the overall results.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave a brief and general overview of what methodology and method mean. I discussed differences between post-positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and

pragmatism, arguing that the debate over the best paradigm is something of the past. With the emergence of alternative paradigms, scholars are encouraged to accept different viewpoints and engage in the discussion instead of rejecting viewpoints that operate within different paradigms. Further, I discussed the methodologies and methods used in sectarianism research. I concluded that despite the growing number of quantitative and mixed-method studies, qualitative approaches still dominate the field. Finally, I pointed out several challenges that quantitative researchers face, such as scarcity of high-quality survey sample datasets collected with public funds, the limited number of institutions that focus on and support quantitative methodologies, and the political unrest that sometimes prevents the researcher from accessing the population. I concluded the chapter by presenting the research design of this study.

CHAPTER 5 : QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Dataset

Th AB constitutes nationally representative and high-quality public opinion survey data conducted by the Arab Barometer, a nonpartisan research network. It is funded by the International Development Research Centre, the United States Institute for Peace, the University of Michigan, and Princeton University. The AB is directed by a steering committee with members from four institutions in the Middle East and North Africa: The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan in Amman, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute at Qatar University in Doha, and One to One for Research and Polling in Tunis. Between 2006 and 2021, the AB conducted 55 nationally representative face-to-face public opinion surveys—over six waves—in 15 countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

The AB is one of the largest publicly available datasets that gives insight into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of citizens across the region. The AB survey includes questions on religiosity, interpersonal and political trust, media habits and consumption, personal and national economic circumstances, women's status and gender equality, governance and political affairs, and international relations. It is worth noting that not all waves collected ethnic and sect identities of Iraqis.

Research Questions

In the introductory chapter, I mentioned that in the first phase of this study I aim to answer the following questions: (1) What is the relationship between the frequency of following local political news and sectarian discrimination? (2) What is the relationship between following local political news from sect-affiliated media and sectarian discrimination? (3) What is the

relationship between self-identifying with a sect and sectarian discrimination? (4) What is the relationship between a person's degree of religiosity and sectarian discrimination? (5) What are the direct and indirect impacts of conflicts and sectarian discrimination? In this chapter, I aim to answer questions #1-4 using the Arab Barometer (AB) survey data, Wave II, collected between February and March 2012.

Hypotheses

1. A positive association is expected between sectarian discrimination and the frequency of following local political news. Thus, I expect those who follow political news more frequently to be more biased against the other sect.
2. A positive association is expected between sectarian discrimination and following local political news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources. In other words, I expect those who follow political news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources to be more biased against the other sect than those who follow local political news from non-sect-affiliated sources.
3. A positive association is expected between sectarian discrimination and sectarian self-identification. I expect those who self-identify as either "*Sunni"* or "*Shiite"* to be more biased against the other sect than people who self-identify as the more generic "*Muslim."*
4. I expect a statistically non-significant association between religiosity and sectarian discrimination.

Data Collection and Measures

All surveys across all waves, collected the AB team, were conducted in Arabic, but in Iraq, some surveys were done in Kurdish with Kurdish speaking respondents. AB first developed survey questions in English and then had them translated into Arabic and Kurdish by experts at

the Arab Barometer hub institutions mentioned above. The final translation was approved by the steering committee, which was composed of diverse members from the MENA region. The final approval of the translation was done to ensure that the wording was understood by all participants.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

There are not address registers in the MENA region. Therefore, the sampling frame that the AB relies on, to sample all citizens who are 18 and older, is pairing maps with the latest official population estimates. The second wave that I use in this dissertation relied on the Iraqi General Census of housing and population data from 1997 and updated in 2007. Furthermore, this wave was stratified by governorate and sub-stratified by the type of settlement (urban/rural). This wave used stratified probability sampling to ensure that all respondents had a probability of being sampled unequal to zero. Out of all 18 governorates in Iraq, 10 were sampled—Salah Al-Din, Basra, Babylon, Mosul, Dhi Qar, Diyala, Sulaymaniah, Najaf, Erbil, and Baghdad—with a total of 20 strata. Within each stratum, primary sampling unites (PSUs)[22] were randomly selected, then within each PSU, blocks were used as secondary sampling units, each block containing approximately 100-250 households. A total of 40 PSUs were sampled in this wave and for each PSU, 15 interviews were conducted. Finally, a probability proportional to size (PPS) was used to allocate interviews to each stratum, which means each stratum allocates

[22] The AB website defines primary sampling units (PSUs) as pre-defined geographic units that have been demarcated by the country's central statistical authority.

interviews relative to its population.[23] All the data for this wave were collected using face-to-face Paper and Pencil Interviewing (PAPI)[24].

As Table 5.1 shows, a total of 1,234 respondents were included in this survey; 52.5% were male and 47.4% were female. The ethnic and religious composition is as follows: 83.4% were Arabs, 14.5% were Kurds, 1.9 were Assyrian, 37% self-identified as Sunni, 43.6% self-identified as Shi'ite, and 18% self-identified as Muslim. This is representative of the Iraqi population. Again, the ethnic and religious composition of Iraq is as follow: approximately 75-80% are Arabs and 15-20% are Kurds, 95-98% are Muslims with 64-69% of them being Shia and 29-34% of them being Sunni (CIA World Fact Book, 2021).

Table 5.1 Ethnic and religious characteristics of the entire sample surveyed

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (*n=1234)*
Gender		
Male	649	52.5%
Female	585	47.4%
Ethnicity		
Arab	1,030	83.4%
Kurdish	180	14.5%
Assyrian	24	1.9%
Religion		
Orthodox	3	0.24%
Protestant	2	0.16%
Christian	2	0.16%
Sunni Muslim	463	37.5%
Shi'ite Muslim	538	43.6%
Muslim	224	18%
Khaki	2	0.16%

[23] Source: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/methodology/

[24] The analysis was not adjusted for this complex sampling design because Arab Barometer does not provide any information on design effects, nor do they provide any information on controlling for such things. Again, this is a PPS random sample from different countries. Their technical report can be retrieved from here: https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABII_Methods_Report.pdf

The ethnic category "other" included seven Christian and two Khaki respondents. It is worth noting that the focus of this dissertation is on Arab Sunnis and Arab Shi'ites; therefore, Kurdish, and Assyrian respondents were dropped from the analyses. In addition, I also dropped the missing data, the "I do not know," and the "I refuse to answer" for all the variables analyzed in this study.

Dependent Variables

Sectarian Discrimination

To measure sectarian discrimination, I used the following three questions. First "Should religious or denominational difference be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual?" Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency (1= strongly agree, 2= agree to a certain extent, 3= disagree to a certain extent, and 4= absolutely disagree). Second, "To what extent is belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting your son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage?" When answering this second item, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency (1= constitutes an obstacle to a great extent, 2= constitutes an obstacle to a moderate extent, 3= constitutes an obstacle to a limited extent, and 4= does not constitute an obstacle). Third, "Would you mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors?" Finally, respondents were asked to indicate whether they would accept neighbors from a different sect (1= I don't want them to be my neighbors, and 2= I don't object).

First, I dropped the missing data[25], the "I don't know," and "refused to answer" selections for all the three question and they were 17 cases for the first question, 3 cases for the second questions, and 24 cases for this question. Then, I reversed the scale of the second and the third

[25] I dropped the missing data, the "I don't know," and "refused to answer" for all the variables used in the analysis. The sample sized dropped from 1234 to 862.

variables so that the low values of all three items indicated low levels of discrimination and high values indicated high levels of discrimination. Accordingly, I recoded the second item and reversed the labels as 1= not an obstacle, 2= limited obstacle, 3=medium obstacle, and 4= great obstacle. As for the third item, I recoded and reversed the labels as 0=I don't mind, and 1=I don't want them.

Independent Variables

Religiosity

Before discussing how I measured religiosity in this study, I provide an overview of how religiosity is conceptualized and measured in the literature of the Middle East.[26] Middle Eastern social scientists offer various definitions and scales to define and measure the construct of religiosity. To start, they distinguish between religion and religiosity. Azmi Bishara (2012) states that religiosity is not adherence to a religion but how religion is practiced by people. Religiosity is defined as how people conceptualize, interpret, and practice the messages and teachings of the religion (al-Najar, 1989; Y. Zeidan, 2013) Al-Mahdi (2002) divides religiosity into different types:

1. Cognitive and intellectual religiosity, which is the idea that the individual is knowledgeable about religious laws and concepts but does not practice them.
2. Enthusiastic and emotional religiosity, which is when the individual expresses enthusiasm and emotions towards religion without having a profound knowledge of religious laws and concepts or necessarily practicing religion.

[26] Most of the sources I cite in the section are published in Arabic.

3. Ritualistic religiosity, which is when the individual appears to be a devoutly religious person who commits to religious rituals without having a profound knowledge of religious laws and concepts. Religiosity, in this case, is simply a social pattern and is reproduced in fixed fashion to conform to the group and the society. Bishara (2012, 2018a) argues that this third type is the most common in modern Arab states.
4. Fanatic religiosity, which is fanaticism for a doctrine or religion. The individual does not accept other doctrines or religions and refuses to coexist with them.
5. Authentic and balanced religiosity, which is, according to the Al-Mahdi, an ideal type that combines of the first three types discussed above. It is when the individual is knowledgeable about religious laws and concepts, expresses emotion and enthusiasm for religion, and devoutly practices it.

The existing quantitative survey scales that measure religiosity in the Middle East were mainly developed by psychologists and education studies scholars and were published in Arabic (al-Qadra, 2007; Mahmood, 1997; Quraishi, 2015; Salih, 2007). A significant number of these survey scales were developed in a way that captures different dimensions of religiosity. They measure (a) the individual's belief in the basic and mandatory acts of Islam (such as belief in the pillars of Islam and the pillars of *iman* [faith]); (b) the individual's degree of commitment to these basic and mandatory acts (such as punctuality, frequency, and devotion dedicated to rituals); and (c) the individual's religious morality and ethics and the extent to which the individual's approach to life is based upon Islam.

These scales are in-depth surveys that are arguably more useful for measuring religiosity in the Middle East than those typically borrowed from Western sociological literature. The latter typically measures religiosity using indicators of belief, behavior, and belonging that are more

applicable to a majority Christian context (see Bloom et al., 2015; Saroglou, 2011; Scheepers et al., 2002; Voas, 2007).

Scales of religiosity used in long-standing survey research projects such as AB, WVS, and Gallup World Poll are limited to questions of practicing rituals (such as the frequency of praying and attending the mosque) and religious attitudes such as opinions about divorce, abortion, and drinking alcohol (González, 2011, p. 339). I emphasize that these survey research projects have many limitations; however, they do recognize the necessity for more in-depth surveys that reflects religiosity in Muslim countries.

Acknowledging these limitations, this study used the following questions from the AB Wave II to measure religiosity: (1) do you pray daily? (2) do you fast during Ramadan? (3) do you watch or listen to religious programs on the radio or TV? (4) do you attend religious lessons in mosques? (5) do you attend Friday prayer? (6) do you listen to or read the Quran? (7) do you read religious books? (8) to what extent do you think attending Friday prayer is a criterion for an individual's piety? (9) to what extent do you think praying in a Mosque is a criterion for an individual's piety? (10) to what extent do you think fasting during Ramadan is a criterion for an individual's piety? (11) to what extent do you think attending religious lessons is a criterion for an individual's piety? For items 1-7, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency (1 = always, 2 = most of the time 3 = sometimes, and 4 = rarely), and for items 8-11 respondents were asked to indicate the frequency (1 = to a great extent, 2 = to a medium extent 3 = to a limited extent, and 4 = irrelevant).

After dropping the missing data, I reverse coded all 11 items so that lower scores indicated weaker levels of religiosity. Then, I used the STATA command alpha var1-var11, item

gen (religiosity). The command summed these scores out, create a new variable named religiosity, and checked for the Cronbach's alpha for the religiosity scale which was 0.73.

Self-Identifying with a Religious Sect

To examine the relationship between self-identifying with a religious sect and sectarian discrimination, I used this question: if I asked about your religion, would you prefer the answer be Sunni Muslim, Shiite Muslim, or Muslim? I recoded the variable as dichotomous (Sunni Muslim or Shiite Muslim/Generic Muslim) and dummy coded (Sunni Muslim or Shiite Muslim= 1, Generic Muslim= 0).

Partisan and Sect-affiliated Media

To further illuminate the impact of partisan and sect-affiliated media on Sunnis' and Shiites' attitudes and behaviors, I used the following two items: (1) to what extent do you follow political news in your country? (2) identify the source (the name of the television, radio station, the name of the newspaper, magazine, or website) of your local political news. [27]

For the first item, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency (1 = to a great extent, 2 = a medium extent, 3 = to a limited extent, 4= I do not follow political news at all). I reverse coded the item so that lower scores indicated a lower frequency of following local political news. For the second item, respondents reported 29 sources that they used to follow local political news, all of which were television channels (see Table 5.2). After doing extensive research on the affiliations and funding of each of these channels, I divided them into two categories (sectarian/partisan affiliated; non-sectarian/non-partisan affiliated) and dummy coded (sectarian/partisan affiliated= 1, non-sectarian/non-partisan affiliated= 0). That way,

[27] It is worth noting that this study is limited to investigating the impact of television only and that it is beyond its purpose to investigate the impact of social media and printed media such as Facebook, Twitter, or printed newspapers.

sectarian/partisan affiliated channels are those that either belong to or receive financial support from the Sunni and Shiite political parties, whereas non-sectarian/non-partisan affiliated channels are those that claim to be independent.

Table 5.2 Television channels identified by respondents to follow local political news

Sectarian/Partisan affiliated news sources	Non-Sectarian/Non-partisan affiliated news sources
Al-arabiya	Monte Carlo
Al-jazeera	B.B.C. Net
Al-manar TV	C.N.N. TV
Al-alam	M.B.C.
Foraten	Al-sumaria News
Al-rafedain	Al-baghdadia
Al-sharqiya TV	Al-jadidah
Al-hurra	Al-hiwar TV
Baghdad	Al-rai
Al-hurria TV	
Al-forat TV	
Iraqia TV	
Al-fayhaa TV	
Al-Babelyia	
Al-hurra	
Al-masar	
Salahaddin TV	
Al-mowselya TV	
Al-ghadeer	
Al-aahd	

Control Variables

All analyses controlled for various control variables: age, gender, education, income. Age, education, and income were treated as continuous variables. Gender was dummy coded (male= 1, female=0).

Education included the following seven categories: illiterate/literate, elementary, preparatory/basic, secondary, mid-level diploma/professional or technical, B.A., and M.A. and

above. The AB does not provide details in their codebook on the meanings of each of these categories. Some of them are clear such as elementary and M.A., whereas literate, preparatory/basic, mid-level diploma/professional or technical are not. With that being said, the AB measures these categories from the lowest level of education (i.e., illiterate) to the highest (i.e., M.A. and above). Thus, I treat the variable as continuous. I combined the last two categories and recoded education status (illiterate/literate= 1, elementary= 2, preparatory/ basic= 3, secondary= 4, mid-level diploma/professional or technical= 5, B.A. and above= 6)[28].

I measured income by asking the question, "which of these statements comes closest to describing your household income? Our household income covers our expenses well and we are able to save; our household income covers our expenses without notable difficulties; our household income does not cover our expenses and we face some difficulties in meeting our needs; our household income does not cover our expenses and we face significant difficulties in meeting our needs." Finally, I standardized age, education, and income in all the analyses.

Statistical Analyses and Procedure

I used STATA 15.1 (StataCorp, 2017) to analyze the data. As mentioned above, the focus of this dissertation is on Arab Sunnis and Arab Shi'ites; therefore, I dropped the Kurds and the Assyrians from the analyses. Further, I dropped missing data, "I do not know," and the "I refuse to answer" categories. Table 5.3 summarizes the sample size after dropping the categories (n=862) and descriptive statistics for key demographic and study variables.

Table 5.3 shows that the ages of the sample population ranged from 18 to 75, and more than half of them were male (55.8%). Regarding educational level, 24.83% reported having at

[28] There were very few cases for "MA and above" category. Bachelor's degree had 103 cases, however MA and above were measured together and had a total of only 3 cases. It made more sense combining" B.A.," "MA and above" together.

least preparatory/basic education and 47.22% reported that their household income did not cover their expenses and that they faced some difficulties in meeting their needs.

Table 5.3 Descriptive statistics for all study variables

Variables	**Mean (*N=862*)**	**Standard Deviation**
Age	36.077	12.691
Following Local Political News	2.765	.8
Following Political News from Sect-TV	.862	.345
Sect Identity	.791	.407
Praying	3.717	.605
Fasting	3.723	.565
Watch Religious Programs	2.782	.994
Attending Religious Lessons	1.812	.905
Attending Friday Prayer	2.385	1.169
Reading Quran	2.863	.806
Reading Religious Books	2.073	.953
Praying in Mosque Indicates One's Piety	3.217	.907
Attending Friday Prayer Indicates One's Piety	3.09	.86
Fasting Indicates One's Piety	3.499	.78
Attending Religious Lessons Indicates One's Piety	2.858	.889
Doubting the Patriotism of Other Sects	1.443	.587
Inter-marrying Other Sects	2.99	1.033
Willing to be Neighbors with Other Sects	1.081	.273

	Percentage
Gender	
Male	55.8%
Female	44.2%
Education	
Illiterate/literate	4.87%
Elementary	26.6%
Preparatory/basic	24.8%
Secondary	18.3%
Mid-level diploma	12.6%
B.A. and above	12.6%
Income	
Income Covers Expenses and Can save Some	4.41%
Income Covers Expense with Difficulty	33.5%
Income Doesn't Cover and Face Difficulties	47.2%
Income Doesn't Cover and Face Significant Difficulties	14.8%

As far as following local political news, 39% of respondents reported that they followed the news to a medium extent and 86% reported that they used television channels that were affiliated with or funded by Sunni or Shiite political parties.

The two most highly watched television channels reported by respondents were Al-Sharqiya (23.3%) and Al-Iraqia T.V. (22.3%). The former is allegedly funded by Sunni elites and the latter by the former Shiite Prime Minister Nouri Al-Malki. When respondents were asked about their religion, 79.1% of them preferred self-identifying as either Sunni Muslim or Shiite Muslim as compared to only 28.8% who preferred to self-identify as generic Muslim.

Respondents reported their religious attitudes and behaviors as follow: 79.2% reported that they always pray, 77.7% reported that they always fast during Ramadan, 32.7% reported that they sometimes watch or listen to religious programs on the radio or television, 46.6% reported that they rarely attend religious lessons in mosques, 33.5% reported that they rarely attend the Friday prayer, 50.5% reported that they most of the times listen to or read the Quran, 34.1% reported that they sometimes read religious books, 47.3% reported that to a great extent attending the Friday prayer is a criterion for an individual's piety, 38.1% reported that to a medium extent praying in the Mosque is a criterion for an individual's piety, 64.8% reported that to a great extent fasting during Ramadan is a criterion for an individual's piety, and finally, 37.8% reported that to a medium extent attending religious lessons is a criterion for an individual's piety[29].

Regressions

Again, the three items I used to measure sectarian discrimination were (1) should religious or denominational difference be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual? (2) to what extent is belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting

[29] on pages 85-87 I discuss how these behaviors are relevant to the Middle East and what are their limitations.

your son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage? (3) would you mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors? The first two items are ordinal and the third is dichotomous. Conceptually, it makes sense that these three items measure sectarian discrimination. Accordingly, scaling these variables and creating a latent variable would be one of the common statistical procedures performed. To scale these items, I diagnosed for dimensionality using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). This technique is helpful in finding out if the observed items, indeed, load on one construct (factor) or more. Given the different ranges of the items—in this case two items are ordinal, and one is binary—I used the STATA 15.1 command *factormat*, which allows for a combination of binary ordinal, or continuous variables. Table 5.4 presents the results and indicates that zero components have an eigenvalue of > 1, which means that the three items do not successfully load on one factor; thus, they do not measure one single construct[30].

Table 5.4 Factor loading from principal component factor analysis of sectarian discrimination

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
Doubting the patriotism	0.601	-0.187
Marriage to other sects	-0.023	0.471
Willing to be neighbors	0.586	0.211
Eigenvalues	0.705	0.302

Rather than scaling the 3 items and averaging them out, I used each of the three items as a dependent variable in a regression, with the same independent variables in each case. This helps account for the different drivers of each item among the independent variables. For the first

[30] I also checked for the Alpha Cronbach. It would be unusual for that approach to give a different result than the factor analysis. Indeed, the 3-item scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.16.

two items, I used ordered logistic regression and for the third item, I used logistic regression. The results will give defensible estimates of standard errors and, thus, of statistical significance.

Given the different scales and different equations implied in the models (the logistic equation is a different function than ordered logistic, for example), it is challenging to compare the independent variables across the three dependent variables. I gave each of the dependent variables the same range, 0-1. For item 1 and 2 recoded as (1=0, 2= 0.333, 3= 0.667, and 4= 1) and kept item 3 as it is. The rescaled variables were perfectly correlated with the original variables. Then, I used each of the three dependent variables in an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) with the same independent variables. Technically, the standard errors and the p-values of OLS are off compared to the ordered logistic, but the statistical significances of all variables are not impacted.

Logistic and Ordered Logistic Regression

This study hypothesizes that a positive association is expected between sectarian discrimination and the following variables: the frequency of following local political news, following local political news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources, and self-identifying with a religious sect. Further, this study predicts a statistically not significant association between sectarian discrimination and religiosity. Table 5.5 presents the results of these regressions. The first block (Model 1) presents the results of the ordered logistic regression ran to test the four hypotheses on doubting the patriotism of an individual who belongs to a different religion or denomination.

The second block of the table (Model 2) presents the results of the ordered logistic regression that tested the four hypotheses on considering belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting one’s son's/daughter's/sister's/brother’s marriage. Finally,

the third block (Model 3) of the table presents the results of testing the logistic regression run to tests the four hypotheses on not wanting to have members of a different religious sect as neighbors.

Table 5.5 Logistic and ordered logistic regression

	Model 1 Doubting Patriotism		Model 2 Intermarriage		Model 3 Willing to be Neighbors	
	Ordered Logistic Regression		Ordered Logistic Regression		Binary Logistic Regression	
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Age	-0.05	0.07	-0.04	0.06	-0.21	0.13
Education	-0.02	0.07	-0.12*	0.06	-0.59***	0.15
Male	0.14	0.14	0.20	0.13	0.67*	0.27
Income	-0.08	0.07	-0.17*	0.06	-0.15	0.13
Following local political news	-0.27**	0.09	0.05	0.08	-0.15	0.17
Following political news from sect affiliated channels	-0.17	0.20	0.10	0.17	-0.16	0.38
Self-identifying with sect	0.75***	0.18	-0.19	0.15	2.33**	0.72
Religiosity	-0.82***	0.16	-0.00	0.14	-0.90**	0.28
Pseudo r-squared	0.043		0.006		0.111	
Chi-square	59.26		13.86		53.91	
Prob > chi2	0.000		0.085		0.000	

*$p < 0.05$.**$p < 0.01$.***$p < 0.001$. *n*= 862

To test hypothesis #1—whether the frequency of following local political news is positively associated with doubting the patriotism of an individual who belongs to a different religion or denomination—I ran an ordered logistic regression. As Model 1 in Table 5.5 indicates, the coefficient for following political news is -0.27 ($p < 0.003$) and this means that we expect a 0.27 unit decrease in the log odds of doubting the patriotism of an individual who belongs to a different religion or denomination for every one-unite increase in following local

political news. In other words, the higher the frequency of following the news, the lower the log odds of doubting the patriotism of those belong to a different religion or denomination.

Regarding hypotheses #2, the same regression results indicate that the coefficient for following local news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources is -0.17 ($p < 0.406$). This means that we expect a 0.17 unit decrease in the log odds of doubting the patriotism of an individual who belongs to a different religion or denomination for those who watch local political news from sect-affiliated sources. With that being said, the association between the dependent variable and independent variable is not statistically significant.

To test hypothesis #3—self-identifying with a religious sect, as compared to self-identifying as generic Muslim is positively associated with doubting the patriotism of others who belong to a different religion or denomination—Model 1 in Table 5.5 shows that the coefficient for self-identifying with a religious sect is 0.75 ($p < 0.000$). This means that we expect a 0.75 unit increase in the log odds of doubting the patriotism of an individual who belongs to a different religion or denomination for people who self-identify with a religious sect. And the association between the dependent variable and independent variable is statistically significant.

Finally, to test hypothesis #4—the association between doubting patriotism of others and religiosity is statistically not significant—the ordered logistic regression in Model 1 indicates otherwise, in the sense that the association is significant and negative. The coefficient for religiosity is -0.82 ($p < 0.000$). This means that we expect a 0.82 unit decrease in the log odds of doubting the patriotism of an individual who belongs to a different religion or denomination for every one-unit increase in religiosity. In other words, people with high scores of religiosity have lower log odds of doubting the patriotism of those who belong to a different religion or denomination.

The second block of Table 5.5 (Model 2) presents the results of the ordered logistic regression that was run to test all four hypotheses on considering belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting one's son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage. Results indicate that the association between the dependent variable and the frequency of following local political news, following local news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources, self-identifying with a religious sect, and religiosity is statistically not significant. Results indicate that the coefficient for following local political news is 0.05 ($P > 0.05$). This means that we expect a 0.05 unit increase in the log odds of considering belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting one's son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage for every one-unit increase of following local political news. The coefficient for following local news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources is 0.10 ($P > 0.05$). Further, the coefficient for self-identifying with a religious sect is -0.19 ($P > 0.05$) and the coefficient for religiosity is -0.00 ($P > 0.05$). Again, these results show that all four predictors have a statistically not significant association with the dependent variable.

However, education and income have a negative association with the dependent variable and the association is statistically significant. As shown in Model 2, the coefficient for education is -0.12 ($p < 0.05$) and the coefficient for income is -0.17 ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, we expect a 0.12 unit decrease in the log odds of considering belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting one's son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage for every one-unit increase of education. Similarly, we expect a 0.17 decrease in the log odds of the dependent variable for every one-unit increase in income.

Finally, the third block of Table 5.5 (Model 3) presents the results of the logistic regression run to test all four hypotheses on not wanting to have members of a different religious

sect as neighbors. The table shows the association between the dependent variable and following local political news and following local news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources is statistically not significant. The coefficient for both (following local political news; following local news from partisan and sect-affiliated sources) is -0.15 ($P > 0.05$).

Conversely, the association between the dependent variable and self-identifying with a religious sect and religiosity is statistically significant. Model 3 indicates that the coefficient for self-identifying with a religious sect is 2.33 ($p < 0.000$). This means that we expect a 2.33 unit increase in the log odds of not wanting to have members of a different religious sect as neighbors for people who self-identify with a religious sect. The coefficient for religiosity is -0.90 ($p < 0.000$). This indicates that a decrease of 0.90 expected in the log odds of not wanting to have members of a different religious sect as neighbors for a one-unit increase in religiosity. In other words, people who scored higher on the religiosity scale have higher log odds of not minding having members of a different religious sect as neighbors.

Finally, in all three models, education is negatively associated with all three attitudes being investigated (doubting patriotism, intermarriage, and being neighbors), emphasizing that the association is statistically significant in Models #2 and #3. This reveals that people with higher levels of education are less likely to find intermarriage with another sect an obstacle and are more willing to be their neighbors.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the quantitative results of this study, which consisted of doing a secondary data analysis of the AB survey data Wave II collected between February and March 2012. The results indicate that the frequency of following political news was statistically effective on only one attitude (doubting the patriotism of those who belong to a different sect).

Thus, the effect was positive in the sense that following political news more frequently makes Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites less likely to doubt each other's patriotism. These results also indicate that following the news from sect-affiliated channels was statistically not influential on the three attitudes explored above.

As far as self-identifying with a sect, results show that it has a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of doubting the patriotism of others from a different sect and not willing to have them as neighbors. Finally, the association between religiosity and these attitudes was unpredictable in the sense that often religiosity is inaccurately associated with sectarianism, despite scholars proving otherwise. Meanwhile, these results indicate that religiosity may in fact improve sectarian attitudes in the sense that the more religious a person is, the less likely he/she would be to doubt the patriotism of members of other sects and the more likely he/she would accept them as neighbors.

Notwithstanding, this dataset has a few limitations that need to be addressed. First, the data set was collected in 2012. In chapter 2, I provided an overview of the major political developments that happened in Iraq after 2012. For example, anti-corruption and anti-government protests erupted in the country and are still ongoing. Further, in 2014, the terrorist group ISIS took control of some of the largest cities with predominantly Sunni populations, and it took Iraq three years to regain control. Finally, in 2014, the former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was blocked from governing for a third term, putting an end to his sectarian politics that targeted Sunnis and Kurds. These events have arguably impacted the dynamics of sectarianism, and the AB dataset used in this chapter is limited in providing any insights on them. Instead of speculating without data, I followed up this study by doing 21 original face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites to investigate the extent to

which sectarian attitudes and behaviors have changed since 2001.[31] Accordingly, I asked all 21 respondents recruited for interviews the same questions from the AB data set used in this chapter. Second, this dataset does not provide insights on perceived discrimination. To address this limitation, I asked an additional number of questions during the interviews. These additional questions are extensively presented in chapter 6. Third, given the political developments in the country since 2012, the question arises about how self-identify with a sect has changed. To address this limitation, I asked several additional questions during the interviews. In the next chapter, I will present the qualitative results in addition to the new theme that emerged.

[31] See the interview instrument in the Appendix.

CHAPTER 6 : QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the results generated from the quantitative analysis of the AB dataset. In this chapter, I present the results of the 21 semi-structured follow-up interviews I conducted the with Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites between January and February 2020. I start the chapter by introducing the research instrument, the sample, and the recruitment process. After that, I introduce the field site and explain why I chose IKR. Then, I discuss some methodological challenges I faced while accessing the field and conducting the interview. Finally, I analyze the data and present the results. Again, the goal of engaging with this follow-up qualitative phase is to address the limitation of the AB dataset summarized below.

Main Over-Arching Research Questions

1. Given the political developments in the country since 2012, how have sectarian views changed in Iraq?
2. How do Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites perceive sectarian discrimination?
3. Given the political developments in the country since 2012, how has the act of self-identifying with a sect changed?

Specific Research Questions

The analysis I provide below is centered on the following three main questions:

1. How have sectarian views changed in Iraq since 2012? To investigate this question, I asked participants the same three original AB questions used in the previous chapter to measure sectarian discrimination: (a) should religious or denominational difference be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual? (b) to what extent is belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting your

son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage? and (c) would you mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors? Further, to investigate how Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites explain, justify, rationalize, and articulate their views, I asked these three additional open-ended questions: (d) to what extent do you think there is discrimination against Iraqi Sunnis in your province or in Iraq in general? (e) to what extent do you think there is discrimination against Iraqi Shiites in your province or in Iraq in general? And (f) which group do you think is the most discriminated against in Iraq?

2. Do Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites perceive sectarian discrimination? The original AB survey does not measure perceived discrimination. To explore that, I asked participants the following series of questions: (a) at any time in your life, have you ever been threatened, harassed, or physically abused because of your sect? (b) at any time in your life, have you ever been unfairly humiliated because of your sect? (c) at any time in your life, have people ever directed sectarian jokes or slurs at you? (d) at any time in your life, have you ever been unfairly terminated from a job because of your sect? (e) for unfair reasons, have you ever not been hired for a job because of your sect? (f) have you ever been unfairly denied a promotion because of your sect? (g) have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened, or abused by the police because of your sect? (h) have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened, or abused by an armed group because of your sect? (i) have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened, or abused by a gang or a terrorist group because of your sect? (j) have you ever been unfairly evicted from your house or neighborhood because of your sect? (k) have you ever been unfairly prevented from moving into a neighborhood because the landlord or a realtor refused to sell or rent

you a house or apartment because of your sect? (l) have you ever moved into a neighborhood where neighbors made life difficult for you or your family because of your sect?

3. How has self-identify with a sect changed since 2012? To explore that, I asked participants the following questions:
    1. If I ask you about your religion, what would be your answer? Response categories were (1) Muslim, (2) Sunni, (3) Shiite, (4) Sunni Muslim, (5) Shiite Muslim, (6) I don't know, and (7) refused to answer.
    2. Do you regard yourself as belonging to any religious sect? Response categories were (1) no religious sect, (2) Sunni sect, (3) Shiite sect, (3) I don't know, and (4) refused to answer.
    3. Which of the following best describes you? Response categories were (1) above all, I am an Iraqi, (2) above all, I am a Muslim, (3) above all, I am a Sunni, (4) above all, I am a Shiite, (5) above all, I am an Iraqi Sunni, (6) above all, I am an Iraqi Shiite, (7) above all, I am an Iraqi Muslim, (8) other, (9) I don't know, and (10) refused to answer.

Context: Field Site

I completed fieldwork for the qualitative part of this mixed-method project in the IKR. Taking into consideration the contemporary political climate of the country, which has been fragile since the American invasion in 2003 and the war against ISIS, the IKR is considered considerably safer than the rest of Iraq. Traveling to certain areas of the country outside of the IKR is still physically, emotionally, and economically challenging. In addition to the safety factor, I am more familiar with the IKR territories than with other parts of Iraq. I was born and

raised in Duhok, IKR and my extended family lives there. I speak Kurdish, standard Arabic, and the Iraqi dialect fluently, thus navigating the region is easier for me than navigating the territories that are under the control of the Iraqi central government. The few times that I visited cities under the control of the Iraqi central government was a one-day trip to Mosul in 2002 to see a doctor, a one-week trip to Baghdad in 2004 to do an interview at the Italian embassy, and a two-day trip in Baghdad in 2013 to do an interview at the American embassy.

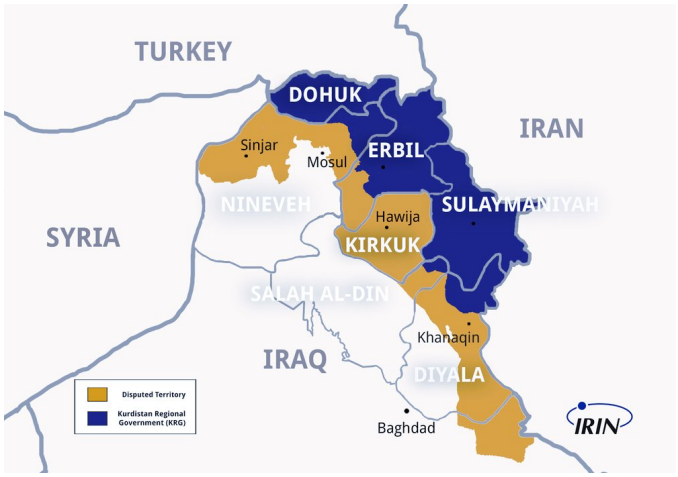

Figure 6.1 Kurdistan Regional Government's Map. Source: IRIN

The other key reason for choosing the IKR as a fieldwork site was lack of funding for this project, and more importantly, lack of professional training to access conflict-affected fields. Therefore, to minimize risks for study participants and myself, I conducted all interviewers in Duhok city, IKR between January and February 2020.

Historical Context: Iraqi Kurdistan Region

In this section, I discuss what IKR is, when and why it was established, and what its political status is within Iraq. IKR is a semi-autonomous federal region in northern Iraq with a predominantly Kurdish population. In the spring of 1991, Iraqi Kurds rose up against Saddam Hussein's regime. The uprising was crushed, and civilians escaped vengeance from the Iraqi Army, beginning a mass exodus toward Iranian and Turkish borders. The United States, in

coordination with the United Kingdom and France, imposed a no-fly zone over northern Iraq and created a "safe haven" for Iraqi Kurds, so they could safely return to their homes. Eventually, the Iraqi government retracted its personnel and military from the Kurdish areas, leaving behind an administrative vacuum. The urge for an effective form of local government pushed the Iraqi Kurds to hold general elections in May 1992. The goal was to establish a local government that could provide public services in the Kurdish-populated areas. The elections led to the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and later in 2005, the KRG gained constitutional legitimacy from the Federal Republic of Iraq. Today, irrespective of its lack of full independence, the semiautonomous region carries political weight in the international community (Mohammed & Alrebh, 2020).

The IKR is situated in the north and northeast areas of Iraq. According to the KRG's website, the region has four governorates: Erbil, Sulaymaniah, Duhok, and Halabja (2020). As of 2014, the population was approximately five million, as compared to Iraq's population of 36 million (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2018). The IKR is overwhelmingly populated by Kurds; however, minority groups such as Yazidis, Christians, Arabs, Turkmens, and Kakais also live there.[32] Since its establishment in 1992, the IKR has enjoyed some relative safety as compared to other parts of the country that went through countless civil wars and conflicts such as the American occupation in 2003, the subsequent sectarian unrest (2005-2007), and the war against ISIS (2014-2017). With the IKR enjoying relative safety and steady

[32] It is hard to know the exact number of each ethnic and religious group because Iraq has not held a census since 1997. An Iraqi census should be held every 10 years as intended; however, the state has conducted only five since 1932 when it became independent from the British. Previous censuses were held in 1947, 1957, 1967, 1987, and 1997, but the last one did not include the Kurdish areas in IKR. The ongoing political unrest in the country and the politicization of identities has made the collection of reliable demographic data on different components of the Iraqi society virtually impossible.

economic growth—driven primarily by oil production—it attracted other Iraqis who sought to flee political unrest and search for better economic opportunities.

The number of Iraqi arrivals to IKR significantly increased in 2014 during the war against ISIS. According to the IOM report, the governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Duhok received great numbers of Iraqis who migrated for economic reasons or because they were forcibly displaced because of conflicts. The majority of Iraqis who moved to the region were originally from Mosul, Salah al-Din, Anbar, Diyala, Babylon, and Baghdad. Those who moved to Duhok city were predominantly from Mosul and Baghdad (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2018, p. 17). This study targeted Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites who were 18 years or older and lived in Duhok city.

Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews[33]

One benefit of using interviews as a research method is that they allow the researcher to control the flow of the questions and let new topics emerge. For this part of the study, I rely on semi-structured interviews that consist of a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. My choice of employing semi-structured interviews was based on conceptual and methodological considerations provoked by the prominent sociologist Eduard Bonilla-Silva. In his book, *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva asserts that mixing surveys with interviews, ethno-surveys, etc. seems more appropriate to study people's racial views in America. Conceptually, surveys restrict the range of possible answers for respondents. Bonilla-Silva writes the following:

> Although surveys are useful instruments for gathering general information on actors' views, they are severely limited tools for examining how people explain, justify, rationalize, and articulate racial viewpoints. People are less likely to express their

[33] The interview instrument is in the Appendix.

> positions and emotions about racial issues by answering "yes" and "no" or "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" to questions (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 11).

Methodologically, he argues that in contemporary American society, it is illegitimate to express racially based feelings and viewpoints. Thus, people tend to choose the "right" answer from the survey that fits the public norm. Therefore, including interviews, ethno-surveys, or other instruments will produce a more realistic image of people's racial views. In chapter 3, I discussed how Iraqis (in a similar manner to Americans) are reluctant to speak publicly about sectarian views due to its perceived negativity. Therefore, researchers must pay close attention to these two considerations when they investigate sectarian views in Iraq. There is no doubt that well-designed surveys are still useful instruments to examine Iraq's sectarian reality. However, mixing surveys with other research instruments allows researchers to cross-examine the results of each instrument and illuminate what is happening on the ground.

Taking Bonilla-Silva's argument into account, using semi-structured interviews allowed me to achieve two goals: (1) to ask again the close-ended questions from the AB survey to see how Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites respond to them in the present time, since the AB survey was conducted in 2012, and (2) to ask follow-up probing questions, but more importantly, to ask open-ended questions that interrogate how Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites explain, justify, rationalize, and articulate their sectarian views. These open-ended questions, therefore, were helpful to overcome any limitations presented by the close-ended questions.

The questions were developed and revised with the help and guidance of some Iraqi and Arab scholars. Special thanks are due to Dr. Hamied Al-Hashimi, a sociology professor at the International College of Islamic Sciences in London, UK, Dr. Mohammed Almasri, executive director of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha, Qatar, and Dr. Haider Saeed, the head of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha, Qatar.

Sample

I conducted 21 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites who lived and worked in Duhok city in the IKR. I conducted the interviews in the Iraqi Arabic dialect between January 29th and February 20th, 2020. With participants' consent, all interviews—which ranged from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours—were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.[34]

As far as the sample, Morgan (2014) argues that in mixed-methods studies, it is common to use the same participants from the primary quantitative phase in the qualitative follow-up phase, but that is not always possible. The alternative is to conduct the qualitative interviews with a new set of participants (Morgan, 2014, p. 159). The case of this study is similar in the sense that the quantitative data analyzed in chapter 5 were collected back in 2012 and it was not possible for me to track down the original participants; therefore, I recruited a new set of participants for these interviews.

The recruitment process started at the University of Dohuk, where I worked between 2010 and 2013 as a full-time lecturer in the College of Basic Education. I reached out to my old coworkers, colleagues, and heads of department who still worked there in 2020. Specifically, I approached the College of Basic Education, College of Languages, and the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies, who helped me recruit most of the respondents. The other channels that I used were family and friends who introduced me to Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites they knew. Finally, in some cases, respondents introduced me to some other respondents they knew. These recruitment channels yielded a convenience sample comprised of 21 Arab Iraqis who lived in Dohuk city. The approximate number of people these channels reached out too—mostly face-

[34] Transcripts are in the Iraqi dialect. An English translation can be provided upon request.

to-face or via phone or text messages— were 35 people of which 21 responded to the interview request.

Of the 21 interviews, I administered 17 of them face-to-face. When I scheduled interview number 18, however, the respondent had a family emergency and preferred to do the interview over the phone. After arriving to my fieldwork location, I discovered that there were a limited number of Shiites in Dohuk City. So, I had to recruit three Arab Shiites from Baghdad, Najaf, and Maysan, and I administered those interviews over the phone as well. Further, to make respondents as comfortable as possible, I let them choose when and where we met. For the interviews conducted face-to-face, all of the respondents chose public places—the University of Dohuk, cafes, malls, restaurants, schools, etc.—except for two who preferred meeting at their offices.

Access to the Field Site and Some Methodological Challenges[35]

On January 2, 2020, around seven o'clock pm EST, I was at Philadelphia International Airport preparing to board an international flight to Doha, Qatar to participate in a 15-day winter school organized by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. I planned to finish the winter school and travel to Duhok on January 15, 2020, to conduct interviews for my dissertation. While at the gate and waiting to board the flight, I kept scrolling through my social media feeds out of habit. Suddenly, my Facebook homepage started to explode with breaking news and headlines about the killing of Qassem Soleimani. Headlines such as *"U.S. airstrikes kill Iranian General Qassem Soleimani," "U.S. Strike in Iraq Kills Qassim Suleimani, Commander of Iranian Forces,"* and *"Iran's Qassem Soleimani killed in US air raid at Baghdad airport"* were all over Facebook. A few days later, Iran responded by launching a dozen missiles

[35] This section of the chapter is being revised and resubmitted to the London School of Economics and Political Science's Middle East blog

at Al-Asad airbase in the province of Anbar and at another airbase in Erbil in IKR where the US and coalition troops were hosted. The situation was tense.

Despite the fact that my journey to the field had just begun, the emotional labor associated with doing fieldwork struck me. While in Qatar and preparing for my trip to IKR, I was anxious about whether things would escalate further during the time that I desperately needed to collect data to meet deadlines and finish my Ph.D. I acknowledge how important fieldwork is, and that scholars' work is a valuable venue through which people's stories are told, but at the same time, I started to seriously reflect on the extent of the emotional and intellectual labor that was required to organize and conduct interviews in a conflict-affected country like Iraq.

Visiting Duhok this time was different. The other times I was there, I spent time with family and loved ones, celebrated *Newroz*[36] and *Eids*,[37] and visited the countryside and villages with my siblings. This time, in addition to the tense political situation, I engaged with my participants who shared their tragic stories of suffering and loss due to conflicts. I emotionally connected to their stories, which in turn triggered my traumas with the war that I experienced first-hand when I was a child.

Until I reached the age of six, anytime warplanes flew in the sky, those annoying sirens blared, and people ran and hid in basements and underground shelters, which I hated; they were dark, dirty, and humid. My earliest memories of war are a glimpse of my younger sister crying and my parents taking her and me to the bathroom. They washed our faces and put handmade gas

[36] *Newroz* or *Nawroz*—in Kurdish it means new day—is a Kurdish holiday celebrated every year on March 1st. It marks the beginning of spring and the Kurdish new year.
[37] *Eids* [feast] are the two main Islamic religious feasts celebrated by Muslims. The first one is *eid'ul fitr* [the feast of breaking the fast] celebrated at the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan. The second one is *eid'ul adha* [the feast of sacrifice] celebrated after the first *eid*.

masks on both of us. They were talking, but I was too young to make sense of what was going on. My takeaway from my parents' conversation was that they heard warplanes and they were afraid that Saddam Hussein would attack us with chemical weapons. After a few minutes, my parents realized we were safe, so they took off those masks and the panic was over, at least for that moment. I do not remember what year that was, but based on my young age, it must have been during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988).

My other vivid memory of war is of the 1991 Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein's regime. I was six years old, and it was a cold March Day when some random missiles hit very close to my house. We ran to my relative's house across the street to stay together and comfort each other. A few days later, my family and another 1.8 million Iraqi Kurds fled from the Iraqi Army's vengeance. We began a mass exodus by trucks, cars, carts, and mules, heading toward the Iranian and Turkish borders (Leezenberg, 2000). After a few miles of the trip, my father's car broke down. We left the car behind, carried whatever we could, and started walking for days toward the Turkish border. All I could see were mountains after mountains and hills after hills. I would ask my mother when we would arrive at our destination, and to comfort me, she would say "right after this mountain." It was a long and tiring trip!

We remained displaced for a few months, but we were lucky enough to return to our homes safely. Not that life was normal again after we came back; the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on Iraq following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and twelve crippling years of poverty and hardship commenced for all of us Iraqis.

To get back to the interviews I administered, I revisited those wartime memories, and I became emotional while talking to the study participants on more than one occasion. I was torn between staying objective as a researcher and being human, empathizing with the participants'

pain. I could not remain indifferent to their life stories and use them as mere "data," but at the same time, I was concerned that getting emotional during the interviews would affect the interaction in overt and subtle ways.

A group of scholars agree that it is difficult to stay objective in conflict environments (Chaitin, 2003; Gallaher, 2009; Zahar, 2009). Nevertheless, it is the researcher's responsibility to carry out methodologically sound research and fulfill the ethical principles (Campbell, 2017; Ross, 2009). Considering these ethics of research coupled with complexities associated with conflict-affected zones, I continually reflect on how I can stay objective and how I can overcome my traumas and anxieties in future engagements with my informants in conflict zones. I am inspired by the courage of some anthropologists, security studies scholars, political scientists, filmmakers, and journalists who work in conflict zones (often at risk to themselves) to share people's stories. I am particularly inspired by Iraqi journalists, activists, and scholars who risk their lives every day to report news from the ground and work hard to rebuild the country.[38] As Kali Rubaii (2018) writes, for them, Iraq is not imagined as an inaccessible "field site," rather a homeland and a site of activism where they return to support each other or die.

As scholars like McGarrol (2017) and Bloor et al. (2008) have rightly pointed out, research training and ethics application processes within academic institutions vaguely engage with researcher's emotional, psychological, and physical risks. More specific to conflict-affected environments, Campbell (2017) writes that the literature on the ethics of research in conflict environments is relatively sparse. Campbell (2017) argues that there are only four books on doing fieldwork in conflict environments and the unique ethical considerations that come with

[38] See the scholarly work of Hayder Al-Mohammed (Al-Mohammad, 2007, 2010, 2012) and Kali J. Rubaii (2019a). Not to mention the bravery of Iraqi correspondents who risked their lives during the war against ISIS (see Saadoun, 2016).

that.[39] Seconding McGarrol (2017), Bloor et al. (2008), and Campbell (2017), I emphasize that junior scholars and Ph.D. students do not always receive adequate fieldwork training relevant to conflict environments. The IRB members, Ph.D. programs, advisors, and mentors need to pay more attention to the emotional health and the ethical and methodological challenges the researcher faces during fieldwork.

Data Analysis

I start the analysis by describing some of the characteristics of the sample recruited for the interviews, then I turn to present the results. To start, Table 6.1 shows that 12 out of the 21 participants were male and nine were female. From their responses, I inferred that 13 of them were Arab Sunnis, six were Arab Shiites, and two self-identified as mixed Sunni-Shiite. Respondents' ages ranged between 19 and 55 years old. Overall, the sample's educational attainment was higher than the AB sample used in this study. Out of the 21 respondents, two of them held a Ph.D., four held a master's degree, 11 held a bachelor's degree, three were high school students, and only one of them had only finished elementary school.

As far their cities of origin, out of the 21 participants, 12 of them were originally from Mosul; eight of those 12 moved to Dohuk between 2014 and 2018 due to the war against ISIS, whereas the other four moved to Dohuk between 2009 and 2013 for security reasons as well. Further, six of the remaining participants were originally from Baghdad; three of them moved to Dohuk between 2003 and 2006, two of them moved between 2013 and 2016, and one of them still lives in Baghdad. Those who left Baghdad did so because of the political unrest that unfolded in the city after 2003. Additionally, only one participant was from Dialay, and again,

[39] The four edited volumes presented by Campbell (2017) are (Mazurana et al., 2013), (Sriram et al., 2009), (Nordstrom & Robben, 1996), (Thomson et al., 2013).

he/she moved to Duhok due to conflicts. Finally, the last two participants were from Najaf and Maysan; they lived in their cities, and I recruited and interviewed them over the phone.

It is worth mentioning that this sample validates the IOM's report discussed above in the sense that the majority of Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites who lived in Duhok city were predominantly from Mosul and Baghdad provinces (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2018, p. 17).

Table 6.1 Characteristics of the sample interviewed

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (*n=21)*
Gender		
Male	12	57.1%
Female	9	42.8%
Sect		
Sunni	13	61.9%
Shiite	6	28.5%
Mixed Sunni/Shiite	2	9.52%
Education		
Elementary	1	4.7%
High School	3	14.2%
B.A.	11	52.3%
M.A.	4	19.0%
Ph.D.	2	9.5%
City of Origin		
Mosul	11	57.1%
Baghdad	6	28.5%
Diyala	1	4.76%
Kirkuk	1	4.76%
Najaf	1	4.76%
Maysan	1	4.76%

	(*N)*	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Age	21	32.42	11.16	19	55

Sectarian Discrimination: Close-Ended Questions

Doubting the patriotism of the other sect

To the closed-ended question "should religious or denominational difference be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual?" 20 participants either agreed or strongly agreed and only one participant disagreed to a certain extent. However, follow-up probing questions revealed that the reality on the ground was more complex.

Amal, who was a 19-year-old Sunni high school student, agreed that Iraqis should not doubt each other's patriotism because "above all, we are all Iraqis." Layla, a 20-year-old university student, came from a mixed background: her mother was Shiite, and her father was Sunni—yet she self-identified as Sunni. She shared similar views to Amal and said, "we all live in the same country. We all have Iraqi citizenship, there is no need for this sensitivity." Ihsan who is Shiite and Idris who is Sunni both thought that patriotism "has nothing to do" with religion or sect.

Even though Bassam, Ahmed, Anwar, and Kareem agreed with the statement, they insisted that the reality on the ground was different in the sense that the government and politicians used sect differences to polarize society and make Iraqis doubt each other's patriotism. For example, Bassam said, "[The government] convinces us that this is Shiite, and this is Sunni, this will kill you and that will follow you…eventually, people believe it."

Yasmeen, a 25-year-old Sunni, agreed with the statement above; however, she noticed that during conflicts, certain sects were portraited and perceived differently. With a sad tune, she said, "for me, there are no differences between us [Iraqis] but during conflicts, you realize there are." I asked her which conflict she was specifically referring to and she stated that it was the war against ISIS. She continued, saying, "we [Sunnis] have become outcasted…from everyone

and everywhere." She added, "They do not accept you just because you are Sunni and from Mosul. *Daesh* [ISIS]…they immediately say you are *daesh*."

Harris, a 48-year-old Sunni from Mosul, fled the city for Bagdad four months after ISIS took control. He stayed there for a few months then moved to Duhok. Harris told me that the main reason he relocated from Baghdad to Dohuk was that he felt unwelcomed by both Sunnis and Shiites in Baghdad. He said, "…. they consider people from Mosul as *ahil al-Tanthim* [another name used in Iraq to refer to ISIS]. They made us feel that they are uncomfortable [being around us]." He recalled that the neighborhood he lived in in Baghdad was a mix of Sunni and Shiite families, yet he could not socialize with anyone. The Sunnis of Baghdad called Harris and his family "the Sunnis of Mosul" to distinguish themselves. I could read the disappointment on his face, and now that I reflect on his words, it is interesting how he expected to be treated better by the Sunnis in Baghdad as if there is an imagined community of Iraqi Sunnis where every Sunni feels protected and welcomed.

The participant who disagreed to a certain extent with the statement above was Kareem, a 49-year-old Sunni from Mosul. For him, this issue dates back to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. He explained that the United States and Iran were using Iraq as a proxy to expand their influence in the region. Analyzing post-2003 Iraq, Kareem added:

> A group of people, majority of whom are Shiites, to be honest, and let's say Shiite political parties too supported and sympathized with Iran, whereas the other group supported and sympathized with the United States… let's say the Shiites supported Iran and the Sunnis supported the United States, not all Sunnis but some of them. Now we have sectarian differences. There is no doubt about some Shiites' patriotism. Some Shiites are very patriotic just like the Sunnis who are very patriotic. But I told you before… some people are very biased towards political parties, some people who have connections with Iranian politics, their [Iraqi] national identity is nullified. I mean [for me] they do not have any national identity especially if they are linked to religious political parties that are funded by Iran. Some Shiites preferer standing with Iran, therefore, I disagree to a certain extent that sectarian differences should not be a reason for doubting the patriotism of those biased towards a sect.

Intermarriage

Now I address the second statement: "To what extent is belonging to a different religion or denomination an obstacle to accepting your son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage?" Out of the 21 participants, 17 of them said it does not constitute an obstacle. Yara, Harris, Adnan, Layla, Idris, and Kareem emphasized that there are mixed marriages between Sunnis and Shiites in their own extended families.

Anwer's response was very interesting. He is a 25-year-old Sunni, but for him, mixed marriages constitute an obstacle to a medium extent, despite the fact that there are several mixed marriages in his own extended family. His grandfather is Sunni, and his grandmother is Shiite. Besides, one of his sisters is married to a Shiite guy, another sister is married to a Turkman, and all his other sisters are married to Kurds. Nevertheless, for him, things have changed since 2003. He explained that sect identities are politized in post-2003 Iraq and conflicts have perpetuated tensions between Sunnis and Shiites. He witnessed that inside his family when he wanted to marry a Shiite woman and his proposal was rejected because of his sect. On that note, Asma shared her son's story. Her son fell in love with a Sunni woman, but the woman's family opposed the relationship because they were concerned sectarian tensions would escalate within the family. Asma mentioned that she knew a Sunni family that mistreated their Shiite daughter-in-law during the civil war.

Being Neighbors

To the third and last statement on sectarian discrimination, there was an overwhelmingly positive response. I asked participants if they would mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors. All 21 of them answered, "not at all." Some of them mentioned that

they lived in mixed neighborhoods such as Amal and Bassam. Idris, who is a Sunni from Kirkuk, mentioned that most of his friends are Shiite, so he would not mind having Shiite neighbors,

Among all the responses, the paradox in Tamir's response stood out to me. He started his answer with "I do not mind. It is actually a pleasure. Demographic diversity is much needed in society." Then he added this:

> But regarding this point, and because of the media and foreign plans in Iraq, diversity has become something scary. I mean a Shiite fears his Sunni neighbor. Why? Because there is a chance that [the Sunni neighbor] would snitch on [the Shiite neighbor] and report him. Back in the days, Al-Qaida would kill [the Shiite] and assault the females and this is scary. Most of what happened in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Diyala was exactly that...A friend would kill his friend just because he is Shiite.

Tamir then relied on storytelling to support his argument:

> Once, a friend and I visited a cemetery in Najaf. My friend told me about this young Shiite guy who was buried there. My friend said that the young Shiite guy was kidnapped and beheaded by his own Sunni friend who then gave his body to Al-Qaida. Can you believe humans reach this level of hatred!

Overall, participants gave significantly positive responses to these three closed-ended questions (see Table 6.2). They displayed openness and tolerance toward different sects, and if we look at these responses alone, they give an artificial image of sectarian relations. However, probing questions revealed that the reality on the ground is not as optimistic. On the one hand, most Sunni participants complained that the 2005-2007 war and the war against ISIS have painted a negative image of them in Iraq and consequently increased discrimination against them. On the other hand, Shiites are painted as pro-Iran, less loyal to Iraq, and pro-Shiite militias. In fact, during the interviews, some respondents indulged in sectarian stereotypes. For example, Harris accused the Shiite majority government of oppressing Sunnis' rights. He said, "The current government is a bunch of people that came from exile … they do not have the best

interest of the nation, especially those Iranians," implying that Shiite politicians who returned from exile are Iranians.

Table 6.2 Close-ended questions on sectarian discrimination

Sectarian Discrimination Questions	Qualitative/Interviews 2020 *(n=21)*
Q1. Sectarian differences should not be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual.	
1. Strongly agree	71.4%
2. Agree	23.8%
3. Disagree to a certain extent	4.7%
4. Disagree	0%
5. Absolutely disagree	0%
Q2. To what extent is belonging to a different sect an obstacle to accepting your son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage?	
1. Does not constitute an obstacle	80.9%
2. It is an obstacle to a limited extent	4.7%
3. It is an obstacle to a moderate extent	14.2%
4. It is an obstacle to a great extent	0%
5. It is an obstacle to a very great extent	0%
Q3. Would you mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors?	0%
1. I do not mind	100%
2. I mind	0%

Sectarian Discrimination: Open-Ended Questions

Nostalgia to the Past and Rushed Sense of Optimism

I now turn to analyze these three-follow-up open-ended exploratory questions to illuminate how both groups explain, justify, rationalize, and articulate their sectarian views: (1) to what extent do you think there is discrimination against Iraqi Sunnis in your province/Iraq? (2)

to what extent do you think there is discrimination against Iraqi Shiites in your province/Iraq? And (3) which group do you think is the most discriminated against in Iraq?

In the introductory paragraph of his book chapter, Haddad (2014b) writes, " no other event—not even the Iranian Revolution of 1979—has had as momentous and detrimental an effect on sectarian relations in the Middle East as the war and occupation of Iraq in 2003" (p. 67). A significant number of the participants that I interviewed—particularly the Sunnis—strengthen Haddad's argument. A recurrent statement made by participants was that before 2003 people did not know and did not care who was Sunni and who was Shiite. Neighbors and friends did not care much to know the sectarian identity of their surroundings because there was no such thing as sectarianism. Participants expressed nostalgia for those days when people were "simply Iraqis."

Participants associated sectarian hatred with the political events that unfolded after 2003, specifically the 2006-2009 civil war and the war against ISIS. They insisted that the divisive line between a *sectarian-less* Iraq and a sectarian Iraq was the year 2003. In Kareem's words, sectarian divisions escalated after 2003 and they exploded in 2006, when Sunni terrorists attacked the Al-Askari Shrine in the city of Samarra, which is considered one of the most important Shiite shrines in the world. These attacks caused widespread anger among Shiites, which led to the eruption of civil war.

With that sense of nostalgia, some participants expressed a rushed sense of optimism that things had returned to how they were before 2003 and that sectarian animosities have waned. Their rationale was that after years of sectarian unrest, Iraqis have finally realized that what has been happening in the country is a political war and not a civil or religious one. A few participants insisted that the public is not sectarianist and that people do not discriminate against

each other, albeit politicians and those affiliated with politics do. Adnan, who is a 55-year-old Shiite said, "there is no enmity among the public. There is affinity, marriage… I mentioned to you that my wife is Sunni, so my kids' uncles are Sunnis and to this day people have maintained such affinities and marriages." Ahmed said, "I mean people are tired. People understood that sectarianism is created by politicians." Ihsan, who is a 29-year-old Shiite from Baghdad, shared similar views. For him, it was after the ISIS war that many Iraqis realized that it was not the public killing each other; it was not a Shiite killing a Sunni or a Sunni killing a Shiite, but it was the government and politicians killing the citizens. He believes that many Iraqis have become more tolerant toward each other after learning that there are no winners in sectarian conflicts. To support his argument, he mentioned that now he can go to Sunni populated areas inside Baghdad—something he could not do during conflicts.

Some participants recalled the current anti-corruption protests that are ongoing in Iraq as strong evidence of the unity of Iraqis and as a sign of a promised post-sectarian era. For example, Yara said, "I see the Sunni, the Shiite, the Christian, everyone united hand in hand during these protests" fighting against corruption. Similarly, for both Amal and Ihab, there was much less discrimination against Sunnis and Shiites after the anti-corruption protests started. Ihab said, "according to news and videos on the ground the situation is back to almost like before 2003 when you did not know who is Sunni or who is Shiite." Ihab implied that both Sunnis and Shiites were protesting together without regard to one's sect.

Sympathizing with the Other's Pain

Haddad argues that one of the things the Sunnis were accused of was that before 2003 they were unsympathetic regarding Shiite's suffering—real or perceived. Similarly, in post-2003, Iraqi Shiites were accused of not seeing and understanding Sunnis' suffering—real or perceived

(Haddad, 2014c, p. 92). Part of this argument is true—albeit not entirely—and participants' answers to the three open-ended questions I am analyzing here reveal the extent to which sectarian relations have shifted in Iraq, particularly after the war against ISIS.

Many participants expressed sympathy for and acknowledgment of the other's suffering. The Sunni respondents, Anwar, Tahir, Nour, Yasmeen, Harris, Kareem, Ihab, and Sabah, acknowledged Shiites' suffering. Anwer, Tahir, and Nour recalled how oppressed the Shiites were under Saddam Hussein's regime and that they could not practice their rituals publicly. Yasmeen, Harris, Kareem, Ihab, and Sabah acknowledged and sympathized with Shiite suffering after 2003. Ihab said, "both [Sunnis and Shiites] are impacted by discrimination, albeit Sunnis more than Shiites but if you look at southern areas that are populated by Shiites, they live under the poverty level, there is so much hardship." Ihab was referring to the Shiite majority government and its failure to provide basic services to the Shiites. Harris shared similar views when he said, "both Sunnis and Shiite are suffering under this Shiite majority government. Average people lack services and are poor whereas politicians and elites live in luxury." For Kareem, the group most impacted by the war against ISIS was the Shiites.

In the same fashion, the Shiite respondents, Asma, Nasreen, and Adnan, acknowledged and sympathized with Sunnis' suffering. For example, Nasreen believed that Sunnis were unrepresented in the government and those who were in the government were not allowed to achieve their goals. Asma, too, believed that Sunnis have suffered more from discrimination in post-2003 Iraq than any other group.

These views expressed by participants show that in the past decade sectarian division episodes in Iraq have helped Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites understand one another's pain and

suffering. Further, these findings are inconsistent with research that argues that Shiites often do not see or understand Sunnis' claims of victimhood in post-2003 Iraq.

Competing Sense of Victimhood

In the two subsections above, one can find glimmers of hope in the responses of the participants and the idea that after years of sectarian tensions, Iraqis today understand that members of the public do not have anything against each other and that both Sunnis and Shiites sympathize with and recognize each other's pain. Nevertheless, a competing sense of victimhood prevailed in the responses of both groups. Below, I first discuss the sense of victimhood among the Sunnis and then I turn to the Shiites.

Sunnis have long complained that in post-2003 Iraq, the Shiite majority government has systemically used de-Ba'athification and counterterrorism as tools to target and collectively punish them. The findings of these interviews support this argument in the sense that the Sunnis I interviewed complained about being perceived as and associated with terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and ISIS. Many of the Sunni respondents pointed out that the war against ISIS has exacerbated these accusations of collectively associating them with terrorism. Wisam, Harris, and Idris expressed these feelings of encirclement and collective punishment. Wisam said,

> Arab Sunnis right now in Iraq have become the target. If you go to Mosul, you will notice how careful and scared they are even if they are innocent and have done nothing wrong but if they say anything it is used against them… and there are so many malicious claims based on unsubstantiated evidence against the Sunnis in many cities. See, if you are a contractor or an entrepreneur and want to sign a contract, some people or those Shiites or others will come for you and you have to pay them some money … otherwise, your contract will be impacted and perhaps blocked.

Harris' response corroborates Wisam's statement. Harris told me that after the liberation of Mosul from ISIS, he did not think that the city belonged to the people of Mosul anymore. He felt that the city now belonged to the Shiites, and that Sunnis' lands and rights had been taken away

from them and given to the Shiites. He accused the Iraqi government of cooperating with the Shiite Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—also known as *Al-Hashid Al-Sha'bi*—to oppress and marginalize Sunnis in the city. When I asked him how the everyday life of a Sunni inside the city looks like, he answered like this:

> We know some people in Mosul, for example, who have no connections with terrorists. They went to car dealerships to buy some cars and they [*Al-Hashid*] saw that these people are rich and have money… this actually has happened, and we have heard it happen that they went missing with their money.

When I asked who kidnapped them, he replied, "*Al-Hashid*. They now have formed gangs in Mosul, it is crazy." According to him, when rich Arab Sunnis who lived in IKR visited Mosul, they did not overstay their welcome and always returned to IKR the same day, for fear of being targeted.

Like Wisam and Harris, Idris, who is from Kirkuk, complained about the Shiite militias, specifically the PMF in Kirkuk:

> Every day, you see their military cars… playing their *latmiyat*[40] with high volume and you are forced to pass by and do nothing about it… also with transportation, it is the same thing, discrimination against the Sunnis. I emphasize, discrimination, and I specify not by internal security forces nor the limitary forces, never, but by those [PMF]. They are organized to a degree that I am a university professor and if I have a Shiite student, I must treat this student better than others otherwise he [the student] will do everything to provoke me to get a reaction out of me. Whenever you apply rules to that student, he will say you did this and will then report you to the PMF. Even if he cheats and you catch him, he will go and report you…it has reached this level.

Wisam is from Hawija town in the Kirkuk province. It is mostly populated by Arab Sunnis and in 2013 the town held mass protests against Nouri al-Maliki's government (2006-2014). In 2014, ISIS took control of Hawija, and in 2017 the Iraqi government liberated it. Wisam said that the Sunnis from Hawija were often perceived as suspicious, just like the Sunnis from Mosul:

> I am from Kirkuk and if I go to Baghdad and come back to Kirkuk, they [PMF] will prevent me from entering the city because I am from Hawija. Processing paperwork in

[40] "*Latmiyat* refer to Shi'i mourning rituals commemorating the death of Hussein" (Haddad, 2014c, p. 97).

> government offices is a challenge, too. They ask many questions; you are from Hawija means you are a Sunni which means you are suspicious.

Other Sunnis participants such as Anwar and Amal also believed that the group most disadvantaged and discriminated against in Iraq was the Sunnis. In Amal's words, "honestly, [under this] Shiite government the Kurds and Sunnis are at disadvantage. They, as a Shiite government, will not hurt their own sect but for sure they will hurt the Sunnis more."

I discussed above that the Shiite participants acknowledged and sympathized with the Sunnis' suffering in post-2003 Iraq. Nevertheless, two of the Shiite participants downplayed discrimination against the Sunnis and offered a different narrative about their situation after the war against ISIS. When I asked Adnan to what extent he thought the Sunnis were discriminated against in Mosul, he first acknowledged that there were political tensions between the Sunnis and Shiites. He also acknowledged that ISIS did hurt the Sunnis; however, he did not believe that there was systemic discrimination against Sunnis in Mosul or anywhere else in Iraq. He said, "They [the Sunnis] have their lives, their jobs, their parliament [representatives], ministers, their streets, and cities, they participate in the government. Now if you go to Mosul, all its institutions from the ministry of education to tax offices are all managed by people from Mosul [the Sunnis]." Similarly, Tamir denied that Sunnis were treated differently in the southern part of Iraq. He said that when the Sunnis from Anbar and Salah al-Din visited Najaf—where he is from—Najafi people treated them well and considered them their guests, despite the hardship, the killing, and the forced displacement that the Sunnis have caused Shiites.

Furthermore, both Adnan and Tamir highlighted the depth of Shiites' suffering at the hands of the Sunnis, insisting that the Shiites were the prime victims of sectarian violence. To support his argument, Adnan said that in Mosul during the war against ISIS, the group that was most forcibly displaced was the Shiites, not the Sunnis. Tamir recalled that throughout the

history of Iraq, the Shiites have always paid the highest price out of all the ethnic-sect groups. Even under the current majority Shiite government, Tamir believes that the Shiites are the most disadvantaged group. For him, the Sunnis are doing much better because they are overrepresented in the government, whereas the cities and areas populated by the Shiites live in poverty and suffer from a huge shortage of basic services.

To summarize, some Sunni participants exhibited a profound sense of victimhood and suspicion toward the Shiite government and Shiite militias, particularly toward the PMF. These findings are consistent arguments that the assertion of Shiite identity in the state and society nourishes Sunnis' sense of exclusion and victimhood in post-2003 Iraq. Further, some Shiite participants also exhibited historical and current memories of victimhood regarding previous Iraqi leaders and parties as well as the current Shiite majority governments.

Perceived Discrimination

To explore better how often Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites feel they are treated unfairly based on their sect identity, I asked the participants a series of closed-ended questions followed up by elaborations and probing questions The stories of the 21 participants show that after 2003, terrorists, armed groups, and militias have forced them (through harassments and threats) to move out of their neighborhoods at least once. Adnan told me that between 2004 and 2006, Sunni armed groups in Mosul continuously harassed and threatened his family. To keep his family safe, he moved to a suburban area controlled by Kurdish and Shiite forces where he felt safer.

Further, more than half of the participants said they or their family members have experienced discrimination based on sect at checkpoints run by either the police, armed groups, terrorist groups, or militias. My findings indicate that the participants from Mosul, Baghdad,

Diyala, and Kirkuk have experienced discrimination at checkpoints more often than the participants from Najaf and Maysan. The reason behind this discrepancy, as explained by Nasreen, who is from Maysan, is that she lived in a city populated by the Shiite majority and chances for her to cross a checkpoint ran by the Sunnis were very slim. Conversely, those from Mosul, Baghdad, Diyala, and Kirkuk, where the population was a mix of both groups, had greater chances of crossing a checkpoint run by the other group. For example, Idris and Wisam, who moved around Iraqi cities for work, often experienced problems when crossing checkpoints. Over time, both learned to use different techniques for a safe and swift passage. For example, one technique that worked for Wisam when he approached checkpoints operated by the Shiite forces in Mosul was playing *Latmiyat* music. He said the checkpoint operators would welcome and pass him through without issues. Idris, on the other hand, told me that the people working at the checkpoints operated by the PMF often argued, insulted, and sometimes even physically assaulted Sunni civilians, especially if they argued with the checkpoint operator. Thus, over time, he learned to smile and act friendly with the operators to avoid trouble.

Another technique used by both Sunnis and Shiites, especially during sectarian upheavals, was using two identification cards: one with Sunni names and another one with Shiite names. That was how Tahir and his brother passed through every checkpoint between Mosul and Baghdad during the 2005-2007 civil war, when he went with his brother to Baghdad to apply for a job. Tahir shared that they used Ali and Hussein as their Shiite names, because if he used a popular Sunni name such as Omer, he said he would have been murdered.

Among the several sad and depressing stories that participants shared with me, Ahmed's near-death experiences affected me. In 2006, he and his family were traveling on a bus from Baghdad to Syria in a caravan with two other buses. When they arrived in Baiji, a city located in

the Salah al-Din governorate, Ahmed's bus was stopped at a random checkpoint operated by masked people. Operators checked passengers' identification cards and the bus passed through. The bus behind Ahmed's arrived at that checkpoint 30 minutes later but never made it through. Ahmed and his family later learned that all passengers on that bus were murdered. He still does not know why his bus passed through safely and the other one did not. The only way he makes sense of that is "*al-Qatil a'ala al-Hawiya*" [killing based on [sect] identity] that swept the country during those years.

As far as employment, five participants from both groups reported that they or a family member were either fired from or not hired for a job they applied for because of their sect. However, all of them said they were never denied a promotion. Finally, 11 participants said that people have either directed sectarian jokes at them or they have directed jokes at others. Nevertheless, all 11 participants insisted that the jokes did not mean any harm and they did not feel offended.

Self-Identifying with a Religious Sect

The results in Table 6.3 show how people responded to the questions about self-identifying with a sect. The results indicate that out of the 21 participants, 15 of them answered "Muslim," two answered "Sunni Muslim," two answered "Shiite Muslim," one answered, "I do not know," and one answered "human."[41] I then converted these numbers into percentages to compare them with the original AB survey question (see Table 6.3). Results indicate that 71.4% of the participants preferred self-identifying as just "Muslim," as compared to 28.8% of people surveyed for the AB data. Further, 19 % of participants in these interviews self-identified as

[41] The "Human" category was suggested by the respondent.

either Sunni Muslim or Shiite Muslim as compared to 79.1% of people surveyed for the AB data. Acknowledging the sample size difference between the two data sets, I cautiously argue that this is a significant change in the ways in which Iraqis self-identify. This is an important finding because it supports the argument that sect and sectarian identities—like ethnic and racial identities—are not fixed and that they change over time.

Table 6.3 Self-identification with a sect across the Qual and the Quant data sets

Data Set	**Qualitative/Interviews 2020** ***(n=21)***	**Quantitative/AB Survey 2012** ***(n=1234) before dropping missing data***
Q1: If I ask you about your religion, what would be your answer?		
1. Sunni Muslim or Shiite Muslim	19.0%	**79.1%**
2. Muslim	**71.4%**	28.8%
Q2: Do you regard yourself as belonging to any religious sect?		N/A
1. No Religious Sect	**38.0%**	
2. Sunni Sect	28.5%	
3. Shiite Sect	23.8%	
4. Refuse to Answer	9.52%	
Q3: Which of the following best describes you?		N/A
1. I am an Iraqi	**47.6%**	
2. I am a Muslim	4.76%	
3. I am a Sunni	0%	
4. I am a Shiite	0%	
5. I am an Iraqi Sunni	0%	
6. I am an Iraqi Shiite	9.52%	
7. I am an Iraqi Muslim	28.5%	
8. Other (human; Sunni Iraqi Muslim)[42]	9.52%	

[42] The participants suggested these two categories to me: human and Sunni Iraqi Muslim.

As Haddad (2014c) points out, when sectarian identities are inflamed due to perceived threats or the hope of gaining political relevance, people are more likely to identify themselves as members of a sectarian group. I rhetorically ask if these findings indicate that sectarian identities are less inflamed in 2020 as compared to 2012.

To the second question, 38 % of respondents said they do not regard themselves as belonging to any sect. Interestingly, some of those who did say they felt belonging to either the Sunni or the Shiite sect told me they belonged by birth and not by choice. For example, Tahir said he was areligious, he did not practice any religion, and he insisted on more than one occasion that he was simply a human being. However, his answer to this question was that he was born a Muslim from the Sunni sect; therefore, he belonged to the Sunni sect. Similarly, Ihab answered, "by birth I am a Sunni, but I do not believe in these things," referring to sect labels. More than one participant began their answers to this question with "by birth, I am a Sunni." From these answers, one can infer that Iraqis believe if they are born into a sect, they automatically belong to it, regardless of whether they practice the doctrine of that sect. For future research, I suggest researchers pay close attention to how they measure self-identification with ethnic, sect, and national identities, especially in surveys where the researcher does not have the opportunity to ask follow-up probing questions to clarify.

The third and final question gave the participants the possibility to self-identify with the national identity (Iraqi), the religious identity (Muslim), the sect identity (Sunni, Shiite), or a combination of all three. Almost 48% of them said they are simply Iraqis. Further, these results show that 28.5% self-identified with national/religious identity (I am an Iraqi Muslim). Only (9.52%) self-identified with the national/sect identity (I am an Iraqi Shiite).

The most interesting finding, however, is that those who combined their national identity with their sect were Shiites, not Sunnis. No Sunni—except for one participant who answered, "I am Sunni Iraqi Muslim"—combined their national identity with their sect identity. This shows that for Iraqi Arab Sunnis, the national and religious identities are more salient than sect identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I extensively presented the results of the semi-structured interviews I conducted with 21 Iraqi Arab Sunnis and Iraqi Arab Shiites. Using this instrument allowed me to ask closed-ended and open-ended questions on sectarian views and compare people's responses to both types of questions. Participants' response to the three closed-ended questions on sectarian discrimination reveal glimmers of hope that after years of sectarian tensions, Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites are much more tolerant toward each other than before. Nevertheless, follow-up probing questions revealed that the reality on the ground was much more complex. First, both groups sympathized with and recognized each other's pain. They insisted that the public did not discriminate against each other, but politicians have politicized sect identities, state institutions, and bureaucracies to turn people against each other. Second, both groups complained about facing hardship when they crossed checkpoints, process paperwork in state institutions, and sometimes when they applied for jobs or tried to join sports teams. Some respondents witnessed how sectarianism infiltrated the everyday lives of Iraqis—neighbors and families that turned against each other, divorces, fights, and breakups.

With that said, this qualitative analysis has some limitations. First, qualitative results are based on a convenient and small sample, which limits the possibility of generalizing the findings to the entire Iraqi population. Second, the qualitative sample mostly came from well-educated, middle-class, urban families, which makes the sample less representative of the population and

leaves out the perspectives of people from other educational, class, and geographical backgrounds. Third, all 21 participants in the interviews lived in Duhok. Due to the small number of Shiites living in Duhok, I had to recruit some Shiites from the southern cities and conduct the interviews over the phone. Finally, the participants may not have understood some of the questions due to the way I worded them.

CHAPTER 7 : DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study combined two datasets to explain sectarian discrimination in post-2003 Iraq. This study relied on the following:

1. Secondary data analysis of the Arab Barometer data set (Wave II collected in 2012) to examine the association between sectarian discrimination and factors such as following local political news, following local political news from sect-affiliated media, the person's degree of religiosity, and self-identifying with a sect.
2. Analyzing 21 semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher in 2020 to explore how certain views have changed since 2012.

Key Quantitative Findings

I used logistic regression and ordered logistic regression to analyze the AB dataset. Surprisingly, the findings revealed that the association between following local political news from sect-affiliated media and the three sectarian attitudes analyzed in this phase of the study (doubting patriotism of those of a different sect, intermarrying with them, and being their neighbors) was statistically not significant.

Another surprising finding was the association between religiosity and the two sectarian attitudes: doubting the patriotism of others and being neighbors with them. I hypothesized the association to be statistically not significant. However, the results indicated that religiosity may improve these two attitudes. Those who scored higher on religiosity may be less likely to doubt the patriotism of others and may be more willing to be neighbors with them. I discussed in the previous chapters how often religiosity is perceived as the force behind sectarianism, yet the AB data revealed otherwise. These findings contribute to the line of research that insists that the association between religiosity and sectarianism is complex and non-linear, as primordialists

believe. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that (1) it is important to distinguish between religion and religiosity, (2) it is important to further empirically explore the complex association between religiosity and sectarianism, and (3) it is important to improve the methods of measuring religiosity in the Middle East to better capture the complexity of this construct (see chapter 5).

Further, and as expected, the AB data revealed that self-identifying with a sect is positively associated with sectarian attitudes such as doubting the patriotism of those of a different sect and being neighbors with them. The AB data also revealed that back in 2012, a majority of Iraqis self-identified either as Sunni Muslim or Shiites Muslim as compared to the data collected in 2020 by the researcher. If we look back at Table 6.3, in 2012 more than 97% of people self-identified with a sect as compared to only 19% of those interviewed in 2020.

These findings are not surprising given the fact that during sectarian conflicts, more people identify as members of a sect for the simple reason that they may perceive a threat to their sect identity and/or because that identity had gained political relevance (Haddad, 2014c, p. 73). In 2012, the country was still recovering from the civil war, and suicide and car bombings were at their peak across the country—most of which targeted the Shia and their shrines. In fact, between January 5th and February 19th, 2012, a series of attacks on different Shia areas in Baghdad, Basra, and Nasiriyah killed more than 100 people. Further, just a few months earlier, in December 2011, the Shia majority government under the leadership of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki issued an arrest warrant against the Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi and other Sunni officials. Those arrests resulted in the Sunni bloc *al Iraqiya* boycotting parliament and, its nine ministers stopped attending cabinet meetings.

Key Qualitative Findings: Attitudes have Ameliorated

As far as the 21 semi-structured interviews, results indicate that when I asked respondents about the three sectarian attitudes (doubting patriotism of those of a different sect, intermarrying with them, and being their neighbors), an overwhelming majority showed openness and tolerance toward the other sect. In Table 7.1, I carefully compare the two datasets. I acknowledge that comparing both sets of data may not make a lot of sense statistically, given the huge difference in the sample sizes and the fact that the second dataset is a convenient sample.

Table 7.1 Close-ended questions across the Qual and the Quant data sets

Sectarian Discrimination Questions	**Qualitative/Interviews 2020** ***(n=21)***	**Quantitative/AB Survey 2012** **(*n=862) after dropping missing data***
Q1. Sectarian differences should not be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual.		
1. Strongly agree	71.4%	56%
2. Agree to a certain extent	23.8%	37.3%
3. Disagree	4.7%	2%
5. Absolutely disagree	0%	0.1%
Q2. To what extent is belonging to a different sect an obstacle to accepting your son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage?		
1. Does not constitute an obstacle	80.9%	11.4%
2. It is an obstacle to a limited extent	4.7%	19.3%
3. It is an obstacle to a medium extent	14.2%	28%/a
4. It is an obstacle to a great extent	0%	41.3%%
Q3. Would you mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors?	0%	
1. I do not mind	100%	92%
2. I mind	0%	8%

Nonetheless, Arab Sunnis and Arab Shiites' responses to the three questions on sectarian attitudes reveal that as of 2020, Iraqis' sectarian attitudes have improved since 2012.

It is particularly worth noting how attitudes on intermarriage have improved. The AB data revealed that in 2012, up to 41% of respondents did not find intermarriage with the other sect a significant obstacle. Meanwhile, during the interviews conducted in 2020, almost 81% of respondents said that intermarriage was not an obstacle at all. This is a significant change. Numerous studies show how intermarriage between the two sects was affected by the civil war (2005-2007) and subsequent events. Haddad (2014c) notes that generally, it is difficult to verify intermarriages because marriage certificates in Iraq record only the school of thought according to which the marriage was performed. Nonetheless, Haddad insists that during the civil war, divorces between Sunnis and Shiites rose and intermarriage dropped (Haddad, 2014c, p. 76)—then they reverted back in 2008. In addition to the shift in attitudes, these interviews also revealed that as of 2020, Iraqis were less likely to self-identify with a sect.

One way to explain these changes is the fact that the country is now much more stable in terms of civil wars, counterterrorism, and sectarian tensions than it was in 2012. More importantly, over the past decade, Iraqis have developed what I call *sectarian awareness*, which has potentially moderated sectarian attitudes. *Sectarian awareness* is the idea that over the years, Iraqis learned that the quota system did not work and that the politicization of sect identities had detrimental effects on their lives. Iraqis are now more aware than ever that the ultimate victims of such politics are the citizens, whereases politicians keep enjoying a luxurious lifestyle far from the suffering of their constituents. In fact, over the past few years, Iraqis have continually protested the system (see chapter 2). During my interviews, many respondents repeatedly referred to these protests to emphasize the fact that Iraqis were frustrated with corruption,

terrorism, and sectarianism. They viewed these protests as a sign of a transition into a post-sectarian Iraq. Again, this awareness may have moderated some sectarian attitudes and may work as a bottom-up force to, using Mabon's words, de-construct sectarianism (Mabon, 2019a, 2020a).

With that being said, portraying these protests as a sign of the end of sectarianism in Iraq is reductive. The reality on the ground is much more complex. First, these protests have been concentrated in southern cities of Iraq and Sunnis, Kurds, and Christians who participate are those who live in those mixed cities and neighborhoods. Second, members of Sunni-dominated cities are hesitant to protest because they are afraid of being associated with ISIS again and thus receive retaliation from their compatriots and the government. Finally, sectarian discrimination and the fear of the *other* still exists; thus, it is perhaps premature to think that Iraq is transitioning into a post-sectarian era.

The Paradox in Responses

During the semi-structured interviews, I asked respondents close-ended and open-ended questions. While the close-ended questions on the three sectarian attitudes reveal glimmers of hope, follow-up probing questions show that the reality on the ground is not as rosy as these answers indicate. For example, many Sunnis complained that the 2005-2007 war and the war against ISIS have painted a negative image of them in Iraq and consequently increased discrimination against them. These findings are consistent with other studies that discuss the disadvantaged status of Sunnis in post-2003 Iraq (Al-Qarawee, 2014; Haddad, 2014c, 2018; Rubaii, 2018, 2019b). Further, some Shiites complained that others perceive them as pro-Iran, pro-Shiite militias, and less loyal to Iraq. More importantly, during the interviews, some respondents from both groups indulged in sectarian stereotypes.

This paradox in people's responses to open-ended and close-ended questions about sectarianism is not new. The prominent Iraqi sociologist Ali al-Wardi dedicated most of his research to the study of the Iraqi character and personality. He noted that Iraqis have *shakhsia izdiwajia*, which may be translated to [ambivalent character] (al-Wardi, 2001).[43] The Arabic word *shakhsia* means character or personality and the word *izdiwajia* means dual. In this context, both words together mean being ambivalent and having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone. Al-Wardi believed that Iraqis were ambivalent in the sense that they had conflicting emotions and attitudes: people may believe in something, but their actions show otherwise. This ambivalence stems from the mixing of Bedouin values passed down through generations and urban values that people acquired after they migrated from the desert to cities. Al-Wardi provides some examples to support his argument. A young Iraqi male who wishes to choose his own future wife and perhaps exchange love letters with her may become angry and upset if he learns that someone is in love with his sister and sends her love letters. Another example the author discusses is religiosity. According to him, Iraqis say that they are religious and may get upset if others are not, yet they are the least religious people and they engage in sectarian conflicts. Therefore, for al-Wardi, it is not surprising to see an atheist Iraqi who *is* sectarian, an atheist Iraqi who *is not* sectarian, a religious Iraqi who *is* sectarian, and a religious Iraqi who *is not* sectarian.

In addition to al-Wardi, Haddad (2013) observed something similar. He pointed out, "Iraqi [s] opinion on the subject of sectarian relations sometimes displays almost schizophrenic

[43] Al-Hashimi (2017) translated it to "dual personality" and "split personality." I disagree with this translation because it implies that it is psychological disorder. Al-Wardi emphasized that the ambivalence in the Iraqi character is a social disorder. Also, split and dual personality may also imply that the person has a multiple personality disorder. What al-Wardi is referring to is different.

tendencies: many Iraqis would adamantly stress the irrelevance of sectarian identity in Iraq and yet subscribe to the most offensive polemics regarding the other." (Haddad, 2013, p. 121). The closest parallel that comes to mind is what Bonilla-Silva (2013) has observed in whites' opinions on racial issues in the United States Bonilla-Silva combined surveys and interviews to investigate the dynamics of racism. He found out that whites' responses to survey and interview questions were contradictory. In the survey, 92 percent of whites showed interest and openness to an interracial lifestyle, whereas the interviews revealed that whites were less committed to an interracial lifestyle and less open to interracial marriages. Bonilla-Silva argues that over the years, whites have developed language and techniques to come across as not racist. They use slippery, contradictory, and often subtle language such as "I'm not black, so I don't know," or "some of my best friends are black," or "I'm not racist, but..."

If we draw a parallel between how white Americans talk about racial issues and how Iraqis talk about sectarianism, we can find some similarities. In both contexts, it is distasteful to hurl racial and sectarian epithets and in both contexts, racism and sectarianism have deeply ingrained negative connotations rooted in etymological, historical, and political factors (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Haddad, 2017b).

In the United States and Iraq, people have developed new strategies to discuss racism and sectarianism without sounding racist or sectarian—exception is made to extremists who care less. For example, Bonilla-Silva found that whites minimized racism and believed it was something that belonged to the past. Similarly, Haddad ((Haddad, 2014a) emphasizes that throughout the twentieth century up until 2003, sectarian identities, sectarian relations—sectarianism by extension—had been an Iraqi social taboo. The Iraqi state and Iraqi intellectuals worked hard to vilify expressions of sectarian identities and promoted a narrative that posited the

multiplicity of ethnic and sect identities as a danger to the Iraqi national identity. They explained any related issue in terms of foreign plots and conspiracy theories that aimed to divide Iraqis. Haddad adds that taboos surrounding the topic of sectarianism may have been weakened in post-2003 Iraq, but they have not been eliminated. Old habits persist and some Iraqis continue to either avoid the issue or adamantly deny that it exists (Haddad, 2014a, p. 209).

To support Haddad's argument, on multiple occasions while I interviewed people for this study, respondents lowered their tones or leaned toward me and lowered their tone when they used terms such as Sunni, Shiite, *al-tayyfia* [sectarianism], as if saying these words out load was shameful or embarrassing. One respondent uprightly refused to use any of these words, arguing that sectarianism does not exist and that saying these words does nothing but perpetuate sectarian tensions. Some other respondents (from both groups) minimized sectarian discrimination against the other sect. For example, at least two Shiites believed that discrimination against Sunnis existed, but noted that it was not as bad as Sunnis claimed.

Another strategy I found was similar to what Bonilla-Silva called "the semantic move." This move is typically expressed in "some of my best friends are black." Some of my respondents from both sects used the move to distance themselves from being sectarian and presented themselves as friendly with the other sect. They typically referred to their close circle of friends as being from the other sect or mentioned that they grew up in mixed neighborhoods or that there are intermarriages in their families, using language such as "my sister is married to a Shiite" or "my son is marrying a Sunni woman."

I argue that drawing these parallels is informative specifically if we want to understand the subtle forms of sectarianism. Even when tensions are low, stereotypes, discrimination, and

prejudice based on sect can still exist. Thus, scholars need to perfect *and* mix different methods, then cross-examine the results to better investigate sectarian attitudes.

Conclusion

I reiterate what constructivists say concerning sectarianism in the Middle East—that sectarianism fluctuates depending on time and space. Even within the same country, sectarianism fluctuates from time to time depending on a number of factors. Therefore, instead of universalizing statements and conclusions on the phenomenon, it is useful to pay close attention to each context in which the subject is being investigated. In this study, I provided a historical background of Iraq and discussed how meanings attached to identities—be that ethnic or sect—and their salience are complex, if not ambiguous. Yet, one thing is certain: the social and political relevance of these identities are continuously shifting, depending on the sociopolitical context. While the history of Iraq is full of episodes of sectarian harmony and less commonly of sectarian divisions, it is safe to say that a combination of external and internal forces exploded sectarian divisions in the immediate post-2003 Iraq in the form of violence and civil wars. As a result, sectarian identity gained an unprecedented degree of political relevance. When the Ba'ath party was removed in 2003 and state institutions collapsed, a political and security vacuum was left in their wake. In that exceptional situation, previously restricted expressions—in the form of identity or ideology—found the momentum to assert their will. The situation provided the best opportunity for intellectuals to establish newspapers and media outlets, for exiled politicians return to Iraq, and for extremist groups to organize. With that being said, over the past decade, Iraqis have continuously protested the new political order in the country. They developed a sense of sectarian awareness that has arguably moderated the negative effects of sectarian politics.

The findings of this study can assist the government and policymakers to diagnose better the potential obstacles to stabilizing the relations between the Sunnis and the Shiites. For example, one recurring complaint of respondents of this study was the discrimination they face while crossing checkpoints. State institutions and policymakers need to address this issue by formulating policies and implementing strategies to regulate these checkpoints and address cases of abuse of power. Further, Sunni's complaints about facing hardship in cities such as Mosul requires the government to spend strategic efforts to rebuild these cities and enhance social cohesion in these mixed populated areas. Further, the government and practitioners in the field of transitional justice need to closely assess the influence of state and non-state actors and the sectarian narratives they spread through the media and other means to expand their strict agenda.

Finally, it is important that the scholarly community develops more sophisticated research tools— like those in race and ethnicity literature—to measure sectarian attitudes. For example, to measure sectarian discrimination quantitatively, one first needs a tool. Typically, a research tool is developed by conducting in-depth interviews, participant observations, focus groups, etc. Then, from that data, several items are selected and with the feedback of experts, those items are revised and re-tested numerous times by conducting pilot studies.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Opening Questions: these questions will be asked to interviewers as a warmup and to get to know them and earn their trust.
What is your age? ***What is your highest educational level?*** ***How long have you been living here?*** ***Follow up where did you live before?***
Partisan and Sectarian-Affiliated Media
To what extent do you follow political news in your country? The response categories for this question are: 1. To a great extent 2. To a medium extent 3. To a limited extent 4. I don't follow political news at all. 5. I don't know 6. Refuse to Answer ***Identify the source (the name of the television, radio station) you use to watch local political news.*** Follow up questions: ***To what extend do you agree/believe that what they are reporting is accurate?*** ***To what extend do you agree/believe that what they are reporting is biased?***
Wars and conflicts (2003-2019)

In what way has the civil war of 2005-2007 impacted your life*?*

Examples of follow-up probing question:
How did you feel about that?
When did that happen?

Example of follow-up probing questions*:*
Would you elaborate more on that?
Would you give me more details?

[Verbal and non-verbal cues to be used as needed]

If I ask you how the civil war of 2005-2007 impacted your life? What would be your answer?

1. Very negatively
2. Negatively
3. Neither negatively nor positively
4. Positively
5. Very positively
6. I don't know
7. Refuse to answer

How has the control of ISIS of some Iraqi cities impacted your life?

Examples of follow-up probing questions:
How did you feel about that?
When did that happen?

Examples of follow-up probing questions:
Would you elaborate more on that?
Would you give me more details?

[Verbal and non-verbal cues to be used as needed]

If I ask you how has the control of ISIS of some Iraqi cities impacted your life? What would be your answer?

1. Very negatively
2. Negatively
3. Neither negatively nor positively
4. Positively
5. Very positively
6. I don't know
7. Refuse to answer

Have you lost someone close to you due to any of the conflicts erupted in Iraq after 2003?

If the answer is [yes] examples of probing question:
How did you feel about that?
When/why did that happen?

Examples of follow-up probing questions*:*
Would you elaborate more on that?
Would you give me more details?

[Verbal and non-verbal cues to be used as needed]

Have you ever been displaced because of the conflicts erupted in Iraq after 2003?
If the answer is [yes] Examples of follow-up probing questions*:*
How did you feel about that?
When did that happen?

Examples of follow-up probing questions*:*
Would you elaborate more on that?
Would you give me more details?

[Verbal and non-verbal cues to be used as needed]

Sectarian Self-Identification

Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religious sect?

1. No religious sect
2. Sunni sect
3. Shiite sect
4. I don't know

5. Refuse to answer

If I ask you about your religion, what would be your answer?

1. Muslim
2. Sunni
3. Shiite
4. Sunni Muslim
5. Shiite Muslim
6. I don't know
7. Refuse to answer

Which of the following best describe you?

1. Above all, I am an Iraqi
2. Above all, I am a Muslim
3. Above all, I am a Sunni
4. Above all, I am a Shiite
5. Above all, I am an Iraqi Sunni
6. Above all, I am an Iraqi Shiite
7. Above all, I am an Iraqi Muslim
8. Other
9. I don't know
10. Refuse to answer

Religiosity
These questions are adopted from the Arab Barometer data set, Wave II with acknowledgment of their limitations.

Do you pray daily?
Do you fast during Ramadan?
Do you watch or listen to religious programs on radio or TV?
Do you attend religious lessons in mosques?
Do you attend Friday prayer?
Do you listen to or read the Quran?
Do you read other religious books?
Other _____

Responses to these questions are measured thusly:

1. Always.
2. Most of the time.
3. Sometimes, and
4. Rarely.
5. I don't know
6. Refuse to answer

Generally speaking, how religious do you consider yourself?

1. I am deeply religious.
2. I am somewhat religious; and
3. I am not particularly religious.
4. I don't know
5. Refuse to answer

Sectarian Discrimination

To what extent do you agree with each of these statements?

"*Sectarian differences should not be a reason for doubting the patriotism of any individual.*"

Response categories for this question are:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree to a certain extent
3. Disagree
4. Absolutely disagree
5. I don't know
6. Refuse to Answer

"*To what extent is belonging to a different sect an obstacle to accepting your son's/daughter's/sister's/brother's marriage?*"

Response categories for this question are:

1. Constitutes an obstacle to a great extent
2. Constitutes an obstacle to a medium extent

3. Constitutes an obstacle to a limited extent
4. Does not constitute an obstacle
5. I don't know
6. Refuse to Answer

"*Would you mind having members of a different religious sect as neighbors?"*

The response categories for this question are:

1. To a very great extent
2. To a great extent
3. To a moderate extent
4. To a limited extent
5. Not at all
6. I don't know
7. Refuse to Answer

Perceived Discrimination based on Sect.

In the following questions, I'm interested in the way other people have treated you or your beliefs about how other people have treated you. Can you tell me if any of the following has ever happened to you?

1. *At any time in your life, have you ever been threatened, harassed, or physically abused because of your sect?*
2. *At any time in your life, have you ever been humiliated because of your sect?*
3. *At any time in your life, have people ever directed sectarian jokes or slurs at you?*
4. *At any time in your life, have you ever been fired because of your sect?*
5. *For unfair reasons, have you ever not been hired for a job because of your sect?*
6. *Have you ever been unfairly denied a promotion because of your sect?*
7. *Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by the police because of your sect?*
8. *Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by an armed group because of your sect?*
9. *Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by a gang or a terrorist group because of your sect?*
10. *Have you ever been unfairly evicted from your house or neighborhood because of your sect?*

11. *Have you ever been unfairly prevented from moving into a neighborhood because the landlord or a realtor refused to sell or rent you a house or apartment because of your sect?*
12. *Have you ever moved into a neighborhood where neighbors made life difficult for you or your family because of your sect?*

Response categories for all items:
Almost everyday
At least once a week
A few times a month
A few times a year
Less than once a year
Never
I don't know
Refuse to answer

Follow-up Elaboration Question (Asked only of those answering "Less than once a year" or more frequently to at least one question.):
Would you elaborate more on that?
Would you give me more details?

Follow-up Elaboration Question (Asked only of those answering "Never" to at least one question.):
Have you ever observed that happening to other people?
[Verbal and non-verbal cues to be used as needed]

How much discrimination do you think there is against Iraqi Sunnis in your province?

1. A great deal
2. Quite a lot
3. Some
4. Not very much
5. Not at all
6. I don't know
7. Refuse to answer

How much discrimination do you think there is against Iraqi Shiites in your province?

1. A great deal
2. Quite a lot
3. Some
4. Not very much
5. Not at all
6. I don't know
7. Refuse to answer

Who do you think is the most discriminated against group in Iraq? *Would you elaborate more on that?* *Would you give me more details?*

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